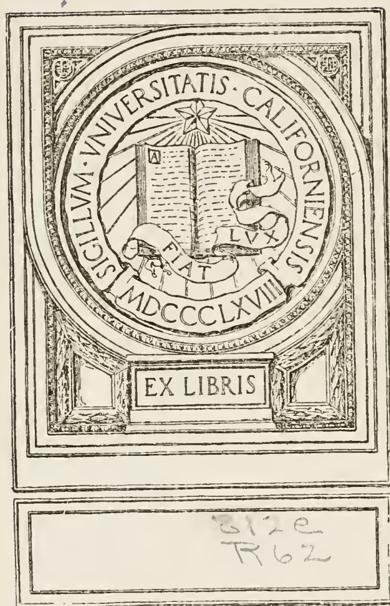
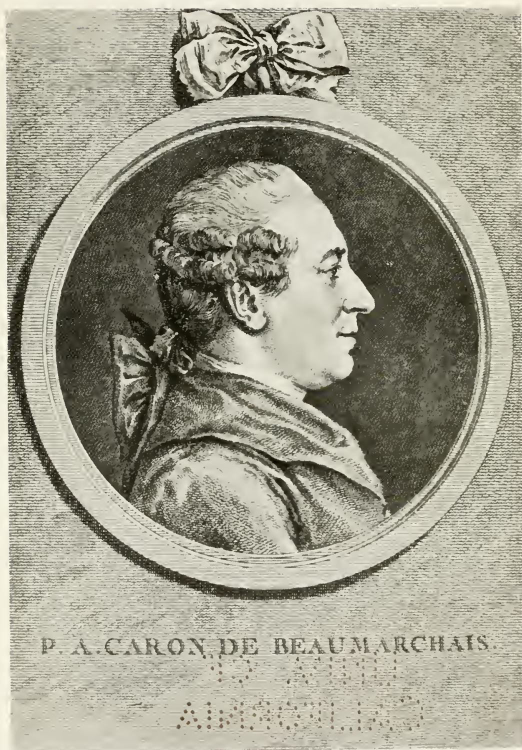

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Figaro: The Life of Beaumarchais



From an engraving by Saint-Aubin, after the portrait by Cochin.

[Frontispiece.

Figaro:

The Life of Beaumarchais

By John Rivers

Author of "Greuze and His Models" and "Louvet: Revolutionist and Romance Writer"

With Eighteen Illustrations

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.

:: *PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.* ::

TO

GEORGE MORTON WILLIS

IN WHOM

I HAVE FOUND

THE THOUSANDTH MAN

PREFACE

"The King of France," wrote Montesquieu in his *Lettres Persanes*, has no gold-mines, like his neighbour the King of Spain, but he has greater riches, for he draws his wealth from the vanity of his subjects—a more inexhaustible source of supply than any mines. He has been known to undertake and sustain great wars with no other funds than those drawn from the sale of titles of honour, and yet, by a prodigy of human pride, his troops were paid, his towns fortified, and his fleets equipped." The journeyman watchmaker, of the witty tongue and unbridled pen, the secret agent, the counsellor of kings, the millionaire merchant-adventurer whose energy and daring contributed so largely to the success of the Colonies in their struggle for independence, the author of two of the most sparkling comedies ever written, the gay, open-handed, cool-headed, hot-blooded creature whose amazing career we propose to follow in these pages must be numbered among those whose vanity went to fill the coffers of the State.

Of course Figaro was not his real name, but then neither was Beaumarchais, for in the least unpleasant, as it was the happiest, pleasantry made at his expense, we are told that "the Sieur Caron borrowed the name of Beaumarchais from one of his wives and lent it to one of his sisters"—a gibe which doubtless annoyed him considerably, for in a sarcasm it is only the truth that stings. In view, then, of the precedent which he himself has set, we have no compunction in borrowing the name of Figaro from the most memorable child of his imagination and lending it to this biography of his creator. We shall find, indeed, as we proceed, that our hero's character, his joyous adventures, and the dramatic changes of his fortune are so clearly reflected in those of his ingenious valet that it is by no means easy to define the limits of their respective activities. And, lastly, if Caron made the name of Beaumarchais famous, the latter rendered the name of Figaro more famous still.

PREFACE

Beaumarchais was a spell-binder, and has succeeded in castin the glamour of his personality over most of his biographers as sure as he did over the majority of his contemporaries. An excessiv indulgence towards the faults of his hero is, indeed, the chief blemis of M. de Loménie's monumental work, which must, neverthele always hold high rank among the world's greatest literary bi graphies. In his fascinating *Histoire de Beaumarchais*, the devote Gudin de la Brenellerie, like a true Boswell, sees no faults whatev in his friend, and later M. Lintilhac and many others have been ev ready to take up the cudgels on his behalf. As a result of the effor of these brilliant apologists a legendary figure of Beaumarchais ha been built up which is not altogether in accordance with the fact The perusal of many unpublished MSS. and several years' stud of his career have led us to the conclusion that his character was n perfect, and that it is possible to accept his uncorroborated eviden too confidently. But in spite of all the reservations we shall find necessary to make, the life of Beaumarchais must for long remain o of the most astonishing challenges which history has ever offered fiction.

J. R.

August, 1922.

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THE LIFE OF BEAUMARCHAIS

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE HANDSOME WATCHMAKER COMES TO COURT

THE arts and graces of the incomparable Madame de Pompadour had for ten years held almost undisputed sway over the withered heart of her blasé monarch when, in 1755, a pushful young man with passably impudent eyes, ingratiating manners and an imperturbable self-possession, made his first appearance at Versailles. He was there by order of the King to submit for the royal approval a minute watch, "the smallest that had ever been made," a masterpiece of skill and ingenuity in an art which he had already carried to a perfection beyond anything achieved by his contemporaries. Most members of the court circle knew him as Pierre Augustin Caron, son of the royal watchmaker of the Rue Saint Denis; for, eighteen months earlier, Lepaute, the doyen of his craft, presuming upon his established reputation, had claimed as his own a new escapement for watches and clocks, which the young man declared he himself had invented and shown to the older man as a friend of the family. To divulge his secret before his discovery had been officially established was, doubtless, imprudent; but trust in the probity of others is at least a proof of probity in oneself. Pierre Augustin was not the man to submit tamely to an injustice. He made so much

noise, and aired his grievance with such a combination of energy, resolution and shrewdness, that he not only won his cause against heavy odds, but proved himself to be a man of affairs of the first order, and, what was more, contrived to attract the interest of royalty itself.

On this first visit to court, Pierre Augustin for a brief space sunned himself in the smiles of august personages, and adroitly assured himself of further audiences by arousing the royal curiosity about other examples of his art, and, above all, by winning the benevolent interest of Mesdames, the King's daughters, and of Madame de Pompadour as well. During the next few months he became quite a familiar figure at Versailles, and was so successful in disposing of his wares to the King, the princesses, the favourite, and her favourites, that he was soon appointed by royal warrant to be one of the Court watchmakers, and was able to set up a shop on his own account.

The son of a Protestant watch and clock maker, Pierre Augustin Caron, the future Beaumarchais, was born on the 24th January, 1732, over his father's shop in the Rue Saint Denis, near the Rue des Lombards, and almost under the shadow of the pillars of Les Halles. He was fortunate in his family. His father, André Charles, was a man of many-sided talent, whose Calvinistic austerity was tempered by a fine taste in literature and the arts, a generous seasoning of Gallic salt, and an inexhaustible fund of vitality—that most universally attractive quality to men and women. His only surviving son, Pierre Augustin, was never remarkable for Calvinistic austerity, but all the other most striking traits of his father's character were transmitted to him in an intensified form, combined with others peculiar to himself.

André Charles Caron was a native of the former province of Brie, being born at Lizy-sur-Ourcq, near Meaux, on the 26th April, 1698. He, too, was the son of a clock-maker, Daniel Caron, and his wife, Marie Fortain. These grandparents of our man were as poor as a family of fourteen could possibly make them. André Charles was the fourth child. Being members of a religion which had been banned since the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and all civil rights denied them (including that of

legal marriage), they had probably been united furtively by a hedge parson. This was in 1694. One of the sons rose to be a captain of grenadiers and to be decorated with the Croix de Saint Louis, and a second to be a director of the India Company and a Secrétaire du Roi. André Charles, as a youth, enlisted in the dragoons of Rochepierre under the name of Caron d'Ailly, and was finally discharged in 1721. In the same year he established himself in Paris to study watch and clock making. A month later he abjured the faith of his fathers and was received into the Catholic Church. When asking to be admitted as a master clockmaker in the following year, he was careful to urge the fact of his recent conversion as a clinching argument in support of his application. After a few years' contact with the world, conscience, in some people, reflects their interests as faithfully—and unconsciously—as a mirror.

His request being granted, André Charles was married on the 13th July, 1722, to Marie Louise Pichon. The father of the future Beaumarchais was a person of culture, not only master of the art by which he earned his living, but a man of considerable literary and scientific attainments. Thus, in 1746, when the Governor of Madrid was inquiring into the best methods of dredging rivers and ports, it was to the watchmaker of Paris that he applied, as a well-known authority on the subject. These were the first relations of the family with Spain, which were to be so fruitfully resumed eighteen years later by his son. Yet, in spite of his many gifts, André Charles never succeeded in making his way, and although at one time or another he made a good deal of money, he was frequently in pecuniary straits, for freedom from such anxieties depends, not so much on the amount of one's income, as on one's prudence in handling it. André Charles in his latter years lived on a pension allowed him by his devoted son.

Pierre Augustin had six sisters, who, like their brother, were all skilled musicians, and could "turn a song (words and music) as neatly as another could turn an omelette," and, being anything but prudes, their songs are frequently broader than they are long. It was a joyous and hospitable household, over the watchmaker's shop in the Rue Saint Denis, as any that you could find in Paris; and the musical evenings and amateur theatricals regularly held

there soon became known to a wide circle of people, and at length came to be spoken of even at court.

Young Caron was thirteen when his formal education suffered a permanent interruption by his father taking him from school that he might devote his whole time and energies to learning the art of watchmaking, of which André Charles was extremely proud. But even at that age, we are bound to say that the youth gave proof of knowing quite as much as was good for him, if we may judge by the first fruits of his pen—a letter in prose and verse, addressed to his sisters, Marie Josèphe (who had recently married an architect named Guilbert and gone to live at Madrid) and Marie Louise (known as Lisette), who had gone with her. Both the prose and verse of this epistle are as astonishing for their effrontery as for their precocity, but they flow from the youth's pen with an ease and felicity which prove that he could not have been such an idler as he would have us think. Commenting on a passage of this letter, when an old man, Beaumarchais says : " I had at this time a madcap girl friend, who, making a laughing-stock of my ardent youth, had just married. I wanted to kill myself." Here, at any rate, is quite enough evidence to establish the relationship between Comte Almaviva's page in the *Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro* and the watchmaker's apprentice Pierre Augustin Caron. Truly the child is father to the man, and in this sense Cherubin is the worthy sire of Figaro.

There is no denying the fact that Pierre Augustin was not always a model apprentice. He had a frantic love of music, which often led him to neglect his work, combined with an equally undisciplined taste for other and less innocent amusements. At one time his conduct became so bad that his father turned him out of the house, and only consented to receive back the prodigal on the intercession of his mother, and after the most tearful promises of amendment and a prompt acceptance of a schedule of stern conditions which was to govern his life throughout the term of his apprenticeship.* This time his father succeeded in really frightening him, and he set himself

* See *Mémoires secrets* (Bachaumont), v. 23, p. 60; and *Correspondance secrète*, v. 15, p. 32.

whole-heartedly to making his mark in his profession. Through the following years he gave his father no cause of complaint; on the contrary, old Caron became excessively proud of his son. And then came the invention of the famous escapement, and the winning of his first lawsuit, followed by his introduction at court.

Even from the first, young Caron had most of the qualities that make for success. "He had a wonderful talent," says La Harpe, "for flattering the great without forfeiting their esteem. . . . In conversing with them he always contrived to convey the impression of being convinced that it was impossible to hold an opinion contrary to his own without having less intelligence than himself, which you may be sure he never for a moment allowed it to be supposed, above all, with those who had little; and, expressing himself with as much confidence as seduction, he made himself at the same time master of their vanity and mediocrity by reassuring the one by the other."*

Pierre Augustin was determined at all costs to make his way, and neglected no detail that was likely to further his ambition. The influence of clothes, for instance, on success in life was no secret to him, for he early realized that to be well-dressed not only gives one self-confidence, but inspires confidence in others; and this is a foible in human nature which he astutely turned to account. His tailor was, accordingly, chosen with great care, and Pierre Augustin was the sort of man who gets well served.

Moreover, he was one of those people who bring gaiety and sunshine wherever they go. From his first appearance at Versailles, says Gudin, the women remarked on his tall, well-balanced figure, his healthy looks, his incomparably witty and amusing tongue, his masterful air, which seemed to set him above all those around him, his delightfully daring eyes, and "that involuntary ardour which flamed in him at the sight of a good-looking woman."† Those who like us possess a magnetism which draws us to them; but those who are instinctively attracted to us offer the most intimate, the most alluring, and indeed the supreme flattery of all the ages.

* See La Harpe, *Notice sur Beaumarchais*, in his edition of the Works, pp. 28-29.

† Gudin de la Brenellerie. *Histoire de Beaumarchais*, p. 11.

CHAPTER II

MME. FRANQUET AND THE FIRST MARRIAGE OF BEAUMARCHAIS

A FEW weeks before Pierre Augustin moved into his new shop a society woman, whose roving eyes had rested upon him with approval at Versailles, visited him on the pretext of bringing her watch to be repaired. Her name was Madeleine Catherine Aubertin, and she was the wife of Pierre Augustin Franquet, whose qualifications for his post of Clerk Controller of the King's Household do not appear to have included a very efficient control over his own. Pierre Augustin was pleased and flattered by her visit; nor was he insensible to her charms, for she was in the full bloom of a brilliant autumn—a phase of womanhood peculiarly attractive to most young men of his years.

As Madame Franquet reached the counter she was suddenly overcome by timidity, and while our watchmaker looked at her with open admiration she told him, in a low, agitated voice, the reason of her coming to see him. Then, taking out her jewelled watch, she passed it to him with lowered eyes. Their hands touched. She blushed, and immediately trembled all over. Her emotion caught and thrilled him like some delightful electric current.*

In undertaking to repair her watch, he did not feel called upon to remedy the obvious disorder in the bosom of its owner. On the contrary, he added fuel to the conflagration. But the man who kindles a flame of this kind may easily find himself condemned to extinguish it. At first her ardour pleased him. Before long, however, he realized that, in a woman especially, such a temperament is a misfortune.

* Gudin, p. 10.

When the watch was mended, he did not wait to be invited to deliver it personally at the Franquets' house in the Rue des Bourdonnais. This gave him an opportunity of being introduced to Monsieur. Soon there was no more constant visitor and intimate friend of the house than Pierre Augustin Caron. No trouble was too much for him in the service of his new friends. Indeed, he made himself so useful and obliging that, later, it was unkindly said he had become their lackey. But this was evidently set down in malice. At any rate, he soon gained a complete ascendancy in the household, and Franquet, who, at forty-nine, was an invalid, was soon persuaded by his wife that he was too old and infirm any longer to carry out his duties with satisfaction either to the King or himself, and that he could not do better than retire in favour of his dear friend Caron, who, she had no doubt, would be willing to pay him a substantial annuity for his office. Accordingly, on the 5th November, 1755, the transfer was effected, and confirmed by royal warrant dated the 9th of the same month. Franquet retired to Vert-le-Grand, near Arpajon, where he possessed a little property. He was apparently well-pleased with the bargain; so was friend Caron, for in securing a footing at court, he had made the first step in the way of his ambition. His duty consisted in marching, with a sword at his side, before "the King's meat," which he had then to place upon the table.

This state of mutual satisfaction, however, did not last long, for Madeleine Catherine, since she had allowed her fancy to wander, had become very discontented with her lot and we find her admirer, now awake to his folly, trying to teach her to be a little more patient.

"If," he wrote, "I listened to the sentiments of compassion with which your sorrows inspire me, I should detest their author, but when I remember that he is your husband, that he belongs to you, I can only mutely sigh and wait patiently till time and the will of God shall put me in a position to give you the happiness for which you appear to be destined."* That sounds rather like the sanctimonious pirate, yet it does seem to prove his fundamental innocence. But he had not the same reason that she had

* Bachaumont, v. 17, p. 120.

to be in a hurry. It was easy for him to talk. He was twenty-three and she, on her own showing, was thirty-three, and was even then perhaps unduly economical of the truth.

However, their troubles were soon over, for on the 3rd January, 1756, Francquet died of apoplexy. We can but hope that his timely exit spared him a humiliating misfortune, for Madeleine Catherine daily found it more difficult to moderate her feelings. The way now being clear, her one idea was to make sure of her dear watchmaker with the least possible delay. The customary year's mourning she considered too long, so she curtailed it by two months, and on the 22nd November had the happiness of being led to the altar by her lover at the Church of Saint Nicolas des Camps.

The Caron family, who perhaps considered the marriage rather precipitate, were not present at the ceremony, and contented themselves with giving their assent in writing. The alliance was still less to the liking of the bride's family, and they also absented themselves.

A few weeks after the union, Pierre Augustin first adopted the name of Beaumarchais from a small property belonging to his wife, situated in the former province of Brie, of which, it may be noticed in passing, his father was also a native. He was so pleased with the name that he persuaded his favourite sister Julie to adopt it likewise.*

Beaumarchais was thrice married, and we have the testimony of each of his wives that he was a tender and devoted husband. Possibly they were easily satisfied; for it is clear he never acquired much control over his imagination—never learnt to possess all womankind in the arms of one wife. The tranquillity of his first matrimonial venture was, at any rate, not unruffled. The outcome of infatuation rather than love, both husband and wife may have expected too much of their marriage. They had yet to learn that our happiness is never quite so complete as when viewed in anticipation or retrospect. Then there was the usual obtrusive mother-in-law, jealous of her daughter's love, and keeping an over-watchful eye on her money. In the marriage contract Madeleine

* Gudin, p. 10; and Heylii et de Marescot, *Notice sur B.*, in their edition of his *Théâtre*, p. 6, note.

Catherine had settled her entire fortune on her husband if he survived her, but, chiefly owing to her mother's determined opposition, the document had not been legally registered, and was therefore invalid. Beaumarchais did not press the matter, but he may have been secretly hurt by the failure to complete the contract, feeling that the omission showed some lack of confidence in himself. To be dependent on his wife's fortune is an invidious position for any man of spirit, and Madeleine sometimes allowed him to feel that she was not unconscious of her power. This led to coolness on his part and reproaches on hers.

"Ah, my dearest," he wrote, "how times have changed! Formerly everything forbade the love we felt for each other; yet how ardent it then was, and how much preferable to our present state! What you term my coldness is nothing but a timid concealing of my feelings, lest I should give a woman whose love has changed into an imperious domination too much hold over me.

"My Julie* marries me, but she who in that time of rapture and illusion used almost to faint with joy at a tender look is now no more than an ordinary woman, who, at the first difficulty, has come to think that she could very well live without the man whom her heart once preferred to all the world."†

Nor was this disillusionment entirely on his side. Her position as the wife of a man so much run after by women must often have been a trying one. He was still young enough, and new enough to court ways, to be pleased and flattered by such attentions, and, being an expansive person when at home, may have recounted his successes of this kind with more zest than discretion. It is always a hazardous experiment for a man to praise one woman to another, and above all, when that other is his wife.

Apart from an occasional breeze, however, there does not appear to have been any very serious unhappiness, and when they got to know each other's peculiarities better they would probably have settled down together quite

* Most lovers christened their mistresses "Julie," after Rousseau's heroine, Julie d'Étange.

† Bachaumont, v. 17, p. 121.

comfortably. But fate ruled otherwise. Madeleine was suddenly taken ill, and died of typhoid fever on September 29th, 1757—ten months after her marriage.

The coincidence of the death of Franquet, an invalid of fifty, so soon followed by that of his widow, just entering on middle age, and recently married to a young man of twenty-five, with whom she was very much in love, at first aroused no comment, especially as the deceased lady was known to have had a weak chest. It was not until later, when the extraordinary financial and social success of Beaumarchais had excited widespread envy, that abominable rumours began to circulate accusing him of having poisoned his wife and her first husband. And when he had the misfortune to lose his second wife, in the midst of a bitter struggle for his life against utterly unscrupulous enemies, these calumnies were revived against him with increased virulence. At last he was obliged, as we shall see, to defend himself publicly against the slanders, calling as witnesses the four doctors who attended his first wife, and the five who attended his second wife. Moreover, he was able to establish the fact that, so far from enriching him, the death of each had, for the time being, absolutely ruined him.

" Through the failure to register my marriage contract," he wrote in his memoir against Goëzman, when stung to the quick by these atrocious insinuations, " the death of my first wife left me absolutely penniless and overwhelmed with debts, yet I refused to follow up my claims in order to avoid pleading against her relatives, of whom I had hitherto had no cause to complain."

Other documents quoted by Louis de Loménie prove the delivery by him of his wife's property, partly to the relatives of her first husband and partly to the members of her own family. But unintelligent people always mistake magnanimity for weakness. Sixteen years later, when Beaumarchais seemed to be at the point of succumbing to the most treacherous and unprincipled adversaries that a man ever had, Madeleine's younger sister, with certain other relatives of the dead woman, thought the moment appropriate to bring forward a claim to still further sums of money on account of his late wife's property. After a legal action of several years' duration, judgment was

made against them, and Beaumarchais was awarded substantial damages. Whereupon, knowing their man, they wrote him supplicating letters, and he, like the easy-going, open-hearted fellow that he was, forgave them and agreed to forget their indebtedness to him.

Enough has been said to show that the evidence against Beaumarchais will not stand a moment's serious examination. Yet he suffered under these imputations for years, and we can only marvel how, under such circumstances, he managed to keep his gaiety, his buoyancy of spirits, his brotherliness, and his readiness to place his time, his talents and his purse at the disposal of all who sought his help. There are few who will not agree with Voltaire, who, when the ugly rumours were first mentioned in his company, said :

"This Beaumarchais is not a poisoner : he is too amusing for that!"

CHAPTER III

THE DUEL

THE death of his wife had, as we have seen, thrown Beaumarchais back into the poverty from which his marriage had enabled him to emerge. By that deplorable accident he lost everything he had gained, except the minor office which gave him a footing at court. A second turn of the wheel was soon to give him an opportunity of more than retrieving his shattered fortune.

It will be remembered that he was a fine musician. He was a noted flautist ; but what especially charmed everybody who heard him was his beautiful voice, and the accomplished art with which he accompanied himself on the harp, an instrument which was then coming into fashion. Just as he had invented an improved mechanism for watches, he now devised and introduced an improved pedal for harps. His reputation as a harpist spread rapidly, and soon got to the ears of the King's daughters, the Princesses Adelaide, Victoire, Sophie and Louise, all industrious, enthusiastic and uninspired musicians. He was already known to them as the maker of the wonderful little watches and clocks which had been so fashionable since their introduction. They expressed a wish to hear him play. This led to his being invited to give them lessons, and soon we find him composing music for them, and organizing charming concerts which were attended by the whole royal family, and a strictly limited number of ladies and gentlemen of the court.*

Modesty was not one of the ex-watchmaker's strong points, and it must have needed all his coolness and *savoir faire* to succeed in the brilliant situation in which he now found himself. Moreover, like Mr. Salteena " he was not

* See Gudin, p. 18 *et seq.*

quite a gentleman, though you would hardly notice it." His high spirits and the incontinence of his tongue were also likely, sooner or later, to get him into difficulties. Such a man can rarely resist the impulse to raise a laugh, however ill-timed it may be, and he seldom reflects that the world's laughter is always purchased at the price of its secret contempt for the jester. Yet, however little respected he may be, the man whose wit arouses mirth is welcomed in society by all except those who fail to see his joke. The sense of humour in royal circles is apt to be of a rudimentary growth, but in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, Pierre Augustin's mistakes of decorum cannot have been of such a serious nature as many would have us believe, for he was, at any rate, diplomatic enough to talk over the Dauphin, and even won his esteem and confidence. "Beaumarchais," he observed on one occasion, "is the only man who tells me the truth."* Now as everybody knows, the heir to the throne, though devoid of intelligence, was full of piety and formalism, so his evidence in this matter has considerable weight.

Many of the courtiers, however, were very much annoyed at the intruder's success, for no man can either deserve or achieve popularity with impunity. It was intolerable that a fellow who, a few years ago, had come, hat in hand, to sell them watches, should now sit at his ease and play the wit in the royal presence whilst they, of the noblest families in the land, should be left to cool their heels outside. Nor was this their only grievance. Some of their womenfolk had had the bad taste to allow it to be seen that they were by no means indifferent to the upstart's blandishments. Again, if the great offended him, his lightning retort was so cleverly turned that they could never feel quite sure whether it ought to be considered as a compliment or an impertinence. If they tried to put him in his place by disdainful words, the prompt and comic insolence of his reply always made them look ridiculous. Even when they devised a carefully-laid trap for him it was they themselves who invariably fell into it. There was no limit to their fury.

One day, in the richest court dress, he left the apartments of the princesses, and proceeded with a firm step

* See Gudin, p. 27.

and dignified bearing through the crowded ante-chamber, when a courtier, hoping to take him by surprise, accosted him, and holding out a beautiful watch, said in a loud voice :

"Sir, will you be good enough, as an expert, to examine my watch : it is out of order ?"

"Sir," quietly answered Beaumarchais, "I have become very awkward since I ceased to practise the art."

"Ah ! I beg you not to refuse me this favour."

"Very well; but I really must warn you that I am awkward." Then taking the watch, he opened and held it on a level with his eyes, pretending to examine the works, and let it fall to the ground.

"I warned you, sir, of my extreme awkwardness," and, with a low bow, he coolly turned on his heel, leaving the discomfited champion of Court jealousies to pick up the pieces.*

On another occasion his rivals spread the news that Beaumarchais was living on the worst possible terms with his father, and caused it to be reported to the princesses, who, believing it to be true, withdrew their favour. Directly Beaumarchais heard of the slander, he set out for Paris, called on his father and invited him to accompany him to Versailles in order, as he said, to show him over the palace. Whilst doing so, he took care that Mesdames should several times see them together. The same evening he presented himself to the princesses as usual, leaving his father in the ante-chamber to await his return. They received him very coldly. Nevertheless, one of them, out of curiosity, asked him with whom they had seen him walking during the day.

"That was my father," he replied, to the great surprise of the ladies. An explanation followed, and Beaumarchais immediately solicited the honour of presenting his father. Thus, in the most natural way, the old gentleman was called in to rehabilitate his son—a congenial task of which he acquitted himself with great enthusiasm and address.†

"In France," said Voltaire, "one must be either an anvil or a hammer : I was born an anvil." The phrase might have been applied at this time just as aptly to Beau-

* See Gudin, pp. 24-25. † *Ibid.* pp. 22-24.



Madame de Pompadour.
From the painting by Drouais.

[*To face p.* 14.

marchais. In 1760, however, almost exactly a year after his honorary appointment as musical director and gentleman messenger to the princesses, he had the good fortune to win the gratitude and friendship of Pâris Duverney, the rather shady but influential financier who, twenty years before, had furnished Voltaire with the means of making the happy transition from the "anvil" to the "hammer" class of society.

This is how it happened. Duverney, now an old man and desirous of perpetuating his name, had nine years before undertaken, with Madame de Pompadour's approval, the foundation of the military college, on the Champ de Mars, the forerunner of Saint Cyr, for the training of young officers.

Unfortunately for him, whilst the building was being erected, the disasters of the Seven Years' War considerably diminished Madame de Pompadour's influence, and, worse still, the enthusiasm of the King and his ministers for a project so closely associated with her name likewise suffered a change. They completely ignored the institution, and, although the building was almost completed and already housed a few students, it languished and was threatened with ruin by the King's neglect.

For years Pâris Duverney had haunted the court, boring everybody he met with the story of his pet scheme, and vainly soliciting the monarch to honour his establishment with a formal visit. At last, in his despair, he decided to speak to Beaumarchais, whom he had observed in constant attendance upon Mesdames. He found the concert director to be a more patient listener than any he had yet encountered at Versailles. Talkative people readily form a high opinion of the intelligence of those who are willing to listen to them, and before the interview was ended, he had the greatest respect for the young man's energy and ability. His hope began to revive, and he congratulated himself upon making so promising an ally. So did Beaumarchais. His one thought was to devise a scheme by which he might be the means of gratifying the old man's ambition. He remembered what had happened to Voltaire. Those people who say they despise money do not know what financial worries are. Beaumarchais was never among them; but as one of the wisest

of the ancients said : " He that hasteth to get rich shall not be innocent."

Without a moment's delay he set to work. Fortunately, he had consistently declined all monetary reward for his efforts in the service of the princesses, and he thought that if he could now induce them to visit the college, they would be sure to tell the King what they had seen, and curiosity, if no more exalted motive, might lead him to follow their example.

Accordingly, when he next saw the princesses, he enthusiastically described the wonders of Duverney's institution, warmly praised his public spirit, and ended by begging them as the only favour he had ever asked, that they would honour and encourage the labours of the founder by themselves coming to see over the establishment. They graciously acceded to the request, and Beaumarchais was invited to accompany them. Duverney received the royal party with lavish ceremony, and the princesses did not fail to make clear to him the benevolent interest which they took in the affairs of their escort. The manœuvre of Beaumarchais was completely successful. A few days later the King, under his daughters' inspiration, so far threw off his indolence as to visit the college in state.

Duverney's gratitude to Beaumarchais was unbounded. From that moment he set about making his friend's fortune. He began by giving him, at ten per cent. interest, shares in one of his operations, involving a sum of 60,000 livres, and then admitted him as a principal associate in many others.*

" He taught me the business of finance," says Beaumarchais, " in which, as all the world knows, he was a consummate master. Under his direction I built up my fortune ; on his advice I embarked on numerous enterprises ; in a few he supported me with his capital or his credit : in all with his counsels and experience of the world. . . ."

Before leaving this subject, we must confess to feeling that, although his connection with the great financier rapidly increased his fortune, it had a detrimental effect on his character and the happiness of his life, whilst it was far from enhancing his reputation either in the eyes

* See Gudin, p. 27 *et seq.*

of his contemporaries or of posterity. In money matters few people think of questioning the integrity of genial, open-handed men like Beaumarchais; yet it is persons of his temperament who want the most careful watching, for it is these who most frequently get into financial difficulties and are commonly the least scrupulous as to the means they employ to get out of them.

We have seen the fragment of a contemporary and unpublished letter, which clearly indicates that this view was firmly held by at least some of his contemporaries. "Beaum . . ." says the writer, "is a man full of wit and talent, but I would trust him neither with my wife, nor my daughter, nor my reputation, and still less with my money."

In 1761, Pierre Augustin took it into his head to buy a brevet of nobility. At a cost of 85,000 livres, he purchased the title of *Secrétaire du Roi*, and thus acquired the legal right to bear the name of Beaumarchais.

He obtained his brevet on the 9th December, 1761. Not content with this step, he made a determined effort in the following month to buy the lucrative post of Grand Master of Waters and Forests, at a cost of 500,000 livres. Duverney, who was becoming more and more attached to his young friend, lent him the money, and his cause was openly canvassed by Mesdames. When the other Grand Masters heard that they were likely to have the ex-watchmaker as a colleague, they collectively petitioned the Controller-General against the election of such an unsuitable candidate, and even threatened to resign in a body if this affront were put upon them. Beaumarchais, thereupon, set Pâris Duverney, M. de la Châteigneraie, the Queen's Equerry, and other friends to work with redoubled energy. He himself wrote and circulated an amusing pamphlet, in which he passed in review the family history of the men who displayed such hypersensitive gentility, from that of "M. d'Arbonnes, whose real name is Hervé, the son of Hervé the wig-maker," to that of "M. Tellès, Grand Master of Châlons, the son of a Jew named Tellès Dacosta, secondhand jeweller, who, after being admitted without opposition, was later expelled because, it is said, he found it impossible to resist the temptation of reverting to the calling of his fathers."

But it is always unwise to show contempt for others:

even the most amiable people hate those who despise them. We cannot help feeling that this was the great mistake Beaumarchais, made throughout his life, and was largely responsible for the bitterness of the hatred so often displayed against him. Sarcastic people seldom reflect on the cruelty of the wounds they so lightly inflict, and are always astonished at the rancorous enmity they arouse in their victims.

By acting together, all who had a grievance against Beaumarchais, were more than once able to frustrate his most cherished plans. Such was the case now. A few months later, however, he was consoled for his disappointment by being accorded permission to purchase the post of Lieutenant-General of the King's Preserves, a less remunerative but much more aristocratic appointment than the one he had failed to obtain. So, once a week, arrayed in a gorgeous robe, the man who in the near future was to hold up the magistracy to ridicule and contempt in the person of Brid'oison, solemnly pronounced judgment, doubtless with his tongue in his cheek, on poachers and such small fry of the environs of Paris.

This fresh advancement in fortune and position served but to irritate still more the hostility of his rivals. Their spite culminated in an unpardonable insult offered him, at their instigation, by a young courtier whom Gudin refers to as the Chevalier de C——. The provocation, we are told, was so outrageous that, notwithstanding the severe laws against duelling, nothing but a resort to arms could wipe out the offence. The antagonists instantly mounted their horses and proceeded to the park at Meudon, where they could fight out their quarrel in solitude. Early in the ensuing combat, Beaumarchais eluded his opponent's guard, and drove his rapier up to the hilt through his body. As he withdrew his weapon, he saw his adversary fall in a huddled heap to the ground with blood gushing from his chest. Overcome with pity, he ran to the aid of the stricken man, and dressed the wound as well as he could with his handkerchief.

"Never mind about me, M. de Beaumarchais ; look to your own safety," urged the Chevalier.

"I must first get you help," he replied, and flinging himself on horseback he dashed off to Meudon village,

sought out a surgeon, and brought him to the wounded man. It was only after he had assured himself that his opponent was in good hands and would receive every possible care and attention, that Beaumarchais rode at full gallop back to Paris to think out his best course of action.

The Chevalier had no sooner been transferred to his home in the capital, than Beaumarchais sent to inquire after him. He learned, with grief, that his late adversary was in a dying condition, but obstinately refused to give any information as to the encounter. All that he could be induced to say was :

" I wantonly provoked an upright man, merely to win the applause of people for whom I had no esteem, though he had given me no cause for offence. I have only got what I deserved."

Whilst the life of the Chevalier still hung in the balance, Beaumarchais sought the protection of the princesses, to whom he related all the circumstances of the unhappy affair. They immediately spoke to the King on his behalf.

" Take such steps, my children," said the monarch, " that nothing more is said to me on the subject." In effect, he did not want to be bothered.

After lingering on for eight days, the Chevalier died without giving a hint which could incriminate the man who was responsible for his death.

The fortitude and generosity of this unfortunate gentleman made a deep and abiding impression on the mind of Beaumarchais, and to his dying day, he spoke with emotion and regret of this painful episode of his youth.*

* See Gudin, pp. 25-27.

CHAPTER IV

SOME EARLY ADVENTURES OF BEAUMARCHAIS

TEN days after this duel, Beaumarchais attended a ball at his friend Laumur's house. He noticed that in one part of the room a game of cards was proceeding. Between the dances he strolled towards the tables and amused himself by watching the game. Now, it is the fate of good-natured people to be sought after and used by everybody, but to be really respected by nobody, and a reputation for this weakness quickly spreads. Beaumarchais had not been at the card table many minutes, when one of the players rose and, drawing him aside, asked him for the loan of thirty-five louis. Beaumarchais learned that the stranger was a man of quality, named M. de Sablières, and, without hesitation, acceded to his request. When three weeks had passed without a word from the debtor, Beaumarchais wrote to him, and received a reply, promising that the money should be returned on the morrow or the day following. After another interval of three weeks, Beaumarchais wrote again. His letter was ignored. At last, losing patience, he sent a third letter :

"Since, sir," he wrote, "you have failed to keep your written word, I can scarcely be surprised that you should dispense with the trouble of replying to my last communication : the one negligence is the natural sequel to the other. This omission on your part, of course, gives me no ground for reproach. You owe me no civility and no consideration. Not having the honour of being one of your friends, what right have I to expect either from one who fails in more essential duties ? This letter is, therefore, written only to remind you once more of a

debt which you contracted at the house of a mutual friend, without other security than the debtor's honour and our sense of what was due to the master of the house whose hospitality we enjoyed. Another consideration, not without weight, is that the money you owe me was not won from you on the chance of a card; but I lent it to you out of my pocket, and in doing so I may, for all you know, have deprived myself of an advantage I might have hoped for if, instead of wishing to oblige you, I had played myself.

"Should this letter not be sufficiently fortunate to produce upon you the effect that it would have on me if I were in your place, pray do not take it ill if I propose to submit the matter to a third party who shall judge between us.

"I will wait until the day after to-morrow for your answer.

"By the moderation of my conduct, I am happy to think that you will judge of the great respect with which I have the honour of being, sir, etc.

"De Beaumarchais."

Disagreeable people are always very sensitive to unpleasantness in others. Moreover, it is annoying to have to borrow money from a man belonging to a class of people whom you have always despised, and worse still when the fellow takes upon himself to give you a lesson in manners whilst reminding you of the debt. The annoyance of M. de Sablières was so great that, when he at last deigned to reply, it played havoc with his spelling and grammar. The one thing which clearly emerges from the incoherence of his letter is his excessive displeasure with his correspondent.

"I care not a snap of the fingers," he concludes his epistle, "for the third party with whom you threaten me, and still less for your moderation. You shall have your thirty-five louis, I give you my word for it; I will bring them myself; but I cannot say whether I shall be fortunate enough to answer for *my* moderation."

Under ordinary circumstances Beaumarchais would have thought very little of such truculence, but, as we

have seen, he was particularly anxious at this time to avoid fresh trouble, so he deemed it expedient to write to M. de Sablières once more, and, after disavowing any intention of wounding the touchy gentleman's susceptibilities, he proceeds :

" Having now explained my letter, I have the honour to advise you that I shall be at home all Saturday morning to await the fulfilment of your third promise. You say that you do not know whether you will be sufficiently fortunate as to be able to answer for your moderation. If a man may judge by your style, you have none too much control over it in writing ; but I can assure you that I shall not aggravate your infirmity by losing my own temper if I can help it. If after these assurances you propose in person to pass beyond the limits of an amicable explanation and to push things to the bitter end (which, however, in spite of your heat, I do not wish to suppose) you will find me, sir, as firm in repelling insult as in guarding against the actions which give rise to it.

" P.S.—I am keeping a copy of this letter, as also of the first, so that my good intentions may serve to justify me in case of accident ; but I hope, notwithstanding, to convince you that, so far from searching for trouble, nobody can possibly be more anxious than I am to avoid it.

" I cannot explain myself more explicitly in writing.

" 31 *March*, 1763."

Beaumarchais sent this letter by Laumur, who explained to M. de Sablières the precise meaning of the postscript. A word to the wise suffices, and, although M. de Sablières shone neither in spelling nor composition, he was not such a fool as you might suppose. He decided not to put his moderation to the test of a personal interview, and adopted a less provocative method of discharging his debt.

About this time, M. de Meslé, Marquis de Faily, induced Beaumarchais to become his surety for twenty-one thousand francs' worth of jewellery which he proposed to purchase from a well-known demi-mondaine. Before the

conclusion of the bargain, the impecunious Marquis obtained possession of the jewels, and straightway sold them at a serious loss. When Beaumarchais heard that not only had none of the money reached the lady but that even the promissory note had not been signed, he wrote a sharp letter to the Marquis telling him frankly what he thought of his conduct.

A few days later the pair happened to meet in the green-room of the Comédie Française, and spoke to each other so passionately that Beaumarchais invited the nobleman to finish the dispute outside. The Marquis objected that he carried only a mourning sword. Beaumarchais pointed out that he himself was no better armed with his light, ornamental weapon, and insisted on his accompanying him forthwith to the fountain in the Rue d'Enfer. There, he ordered his opponent to put himself on guard, and, by the dim light of a street lamp, immediately attacked with such impetuosity that, after a few thrusts, he scratched his adversary's chest with the point of his rapier. The Marquis at once broke off the duel, and declared that if only he had had his proper sword things would have happened very differently.

"Go and get it," retorted Beaumarchais, "and we will meet here again at eleven o'clock." Thereupon he went off to supper with the lady whose diamonds were the cause of all the trouble.

At her house he met M. de la Briche, Ambassadors' Usher, who lent him the more substantial weapon that he wore.

Without waiting for the hour agreed upon for the second encounter, he hurried to the house of M. de Meslé.

"There," he wrote in a letter describing the affair, "the dear Marquis, wrapped in his blankets, sent me word that he was suffering from colic, but would see me on the morrow. He did come, and at once muttered excuses. I forced him to come and repeat them before our common friend, Prince Belosenski, which he did."*

Beaumarchais was at this time on the best possible terms with several ladies of the class to which the heroine

* These letters are contained in 12 volumes of Beaumarchais MSS., for many years in a London bookseller's catalogue without finding a purchaser. The collection was eventually acquired by the Director of the Théâtre Français for the sum of £8.

of this episode belonged. His name is frequently mentioned in the indiscreet pages of M. de Sartine's "Journal," sometimes coupled with that of Mlle. Lacour, and more often with that of Mlle. la Croix of the Opéra. To the first lady he often paid light homage in lighter verse; his relations with the second were of a more serious nature. Not being overburdened with scruples in these matters, he had, without compunction, taken her from his friend, Prince Belosenski, leaving the disconsolate Pole to ponder over his simplicity in introducing them to each other. There is no denying the fact that he was a fickle lover, and the women he met at this period were not remarkable for constancy.

"I divert myself from business," he wrote, "with fine literature, fine music, and sometimes with fine women."

But if his bearing in some circles was not irreproachable, at home he was at his best. He was the life and soul of the household: a model son, and the most devoted and affectionate of brothers. His sisters idolized him. Never was there a more harmonious family. Between its members there was a constant interchange of little attentions and graceful compliments; and yet they could be perfectly frank with each other without giving offence, for they all realized that to say unpalatable things to one's intimates may, on occasion, be a duty, but must never be taken as a privilege of relationship; on the contrary, the more intimate the connection, the more necessary is it to exercise tact and courtesy. Beaumarchais had recently purchased a fine house, number 26, Rue Condé, and at once took his father, a widower since 1756, and his unmarried sisters to live with him.

It was about 1765 (the precise date is uncertain) that his relations with the princesses were severed. The cause of the rupture has been explained in at least half-a-dozen different ways; Beaumarchais himself supplying two versions. The reliability of the witnesses (including himself) is not above suspicion; nevertheless, we have enough to form a fairly accurate idea of what happened. Everybody agrees that his successes had by this time made rather a coxcomb of him, and it may very well be, as his enemies declared, that he took liberties, or at any rate, put himself



Mme. Adélaïde de France.
From the portrait by Nattier.

[*To face p.* 24.

too much at his ease with the princesses. Again, most of his rivals had come under the lash of his caustic tongue, and with them he was never at any pains to conceal his arrogance. Some imprudence of word or gesture must have given his enemies an opportunity of bringing about his dismissal.

"He made himself so much at home," says Collé in his *Journal*, "in the apartments of Madame de France (Madame Adelaide) that M. de Saint Florentin felt obliged to write ordering him to leave Versailles and not to appear there again. Having afterwards established himself in Paris, it is said that when asked the cause of his retirement, he replied: 'It was not surprising that, young as I was, with a pretty good figure, and well-furnished with a number of little talents dear to women—it was not surprising, that it should have been feared that all this might turn Madame Adelaide's head.' I am assured," continued Collé, "that these were his very words." The story is not out of character, and is, on the whole, the least improbable account of the episode that has come down to us.

Beaumarchais declares that it was not until 1768, a month after his second marriage, that he lost the good will of the King, though he admits that court circles were already inclined to look askance at him as a daring thinker whose illuminating criticisms, conveyed in a jest, were vaguely considered to be subversive of the social order—in effect, much as Mr. Bernard Shaw was regarded by many people twenty years ago. On Good Friday of that year, the old Duc de La Vallière (a favourite of Louis XV.) was riding with Beaumarchais to Versailles, when the Duc said:

"I am to sup to-night in the private apartments with the King, Mme. Du Barry, and a few of the elect. I wish I could find something to say to enliven the supper, as a rule they are terribly dull!"

"If the masters are in a serious mood," replied Beaumarchais, smiling, "tell them what our Sophie Arnould said to the Comte de Lauraguais the other evening: 'Dost thou remember, Sophie,' said the Comte, 'the first days of our love, when I used to steal each night into thy father's house, under all sorts of disguises?'—'Ah! what a good time that was!' she cried, 'how unhappy we were!'

This delightful *mot* might lead to others, perhaps not so piquant, but calculated to bring gaiety to the supper."

"If, on the contrary," he continued, "you find them in a merry mood, throw a little moral reflection across the royal gaiety, such as this : 'Whilst we are laughing here, has it ever occurred to you, Sire, that Your Majesty owes more livres of twenty sols than the number of minutes that have elapsed since the event whose anniversary we keep to-day.'

"Such a strange assertion will arrest everybody's attention, and will probably be denied. Each guest will take a pencil and endeavour to show you your mistake in order to laugh at your expense." Beaumarchais worked out the sum, which came to 929,948,048 minutes. "The King," he added, "cannot be ignorant of the fact that he owes more than a thousand millions of livres, perhaps two."

The old courtier, having verified the calculation, and hoping to attract attention and perhaps even to be admitted into the ministry, broke in upon the gaiety of a particularly boisterous evening with this proposition. The other guests immediately fell upon him in a body, and reproached him with spoiling the royal supper. They at once set about trying to remove the painful impression which the Duc's words had created in the King's mind.

"What you say," muttered Louis, "reminds us of the human skeleton which the ancient Egyptians used to serve among the fruits and flowers of their banquets in order to moderate the noisy exultation of the guests. Was this your own reflection, Duc ?"

Startled by the gloomy effect of his problem, the old courtier hastened to reply :

"No, Sire, it was Beaumarchais who put this foolery into my head."

The monarch left the table without speaking.

Some one said : "This Beaumarchais is a dangerous fellow, with his romantic ideas on finance and liberty ! Is he not an Economist? "

"No," answered the Duc, "he is the son of a clock-maker."

"I thought as much, on closely comparing the minutes !" exclaimed the other.



Jones Fecit

LOUIS, XV.

From a drawing by Jones, after a medallion portrait at Versailles.

[*To face p.* 26.

"Thereupon," declared Beaumarchais, "everybody had his say against me, and all believed it their duty to become my enemies. This is the origin of the horrible things that they made me suffer under the Parlement Maupeou, from which my courage alone saved me. Such was my reward for making the King reflect by means of a device which had some success in Paris."*

At the foot of the MS. he adds: "It was from the heat of these empoisoned hours, that, fifteen years later, I took the mild revenge of making Figaro describe the functions of a courtier: 'Accept, take, ask! that is the secret in three words'—as you may imagine, my pleasantry was not calculated to restore my credit in the eyes of the late King's courtiers."

* Quoted by Gudin, p. 53 *et seq.*

CHAPTER V

AN ADVENTURE IN SPAIN

ONE morning in February, 1764, a letter shattered, like a bomb, the tranquillity of the household in the Rue Condé. It was addressed to old Caron by his eldest daughter in Madrid, and was conceived in these terms :

" My sister has just been insulted by a man as influential as he is dangerous. Twice, at the moment of marrying her, he has failed to keep his word, and has abruptly drawn back without even deigning to offer any excuse for his conduct. The tender heart of my aggrieved sister has received such a shock and her nerves are so disordered that we almost fear for her life. For six days she has not uttered a word.

" The dishonour which this event has cast upon her has plunged us into a profound retirement. I weep night and day, in lavishing on the poor girl such consolation as I am not in a state to accept for myself.

" All Madrid knows that my sister has nothing with which to reproach herself.

" If my brother had sufficient credit to procure us a recommendation from the Court to the French Ambassador, His Excellency, in favouring us with his protection, would arrest the evil which this perfidious man has done us by his conduct and his threats . . ."

Old Caron, in tears, handed the letter to his son.

" See what you can do for these unhappy girls," he said, " they are no less your sisters than the others."

" Alas ! " exclaimed Beaumarchais, in his distress when he learned of the grave situation of his sister, " Alas ! what

sort of a recommendation can I obtain for them ? Whom shall I ask for it ? Who knows if they may not be concealing from us something they may have done which has brought this shame upon them."

Upon these words his father passed to him several letters addressed by the ambassador and other influential people, expressing the highest esteem for both sisters. To these were added the names and addresses of other persons of standing who had recently returned from Spain and could testify to their good conduct. Reassured by this independent testimony, Beaumarchais instantly made up his mind. Without a moment's delay, he dashed off to Versailles, and informed the princesses that a painful and urgent business demanded his presence in Madrid and compelled him to withdraw for a time from their service.

Surprised at this abrupt departure, Mesdames asked to know the nature of the misfortune which had befallen him. He showed them his sister's letter.

"Go!" they said, with some emotion, "but be prudent. What you have decided on does you credit. If you act wisely you shall not lack protection."

Just before he left Paris, his friend Duverney, seeing a chance of making much money by the provisioning of troops in Spain, by the colonization of the Sierra Morena, and other projects, appointed him his secret agent in these important commercial transactions, and to this end, gave him notes of hand to the amount of 200,000 francs.

All arrangements were now speedily concluded, and Beaumarchais set out post haste for Madrid. He was accompanied by a French merchant, secretly engaged to safe-guard him by his anxious family.

Riding night and day, the travellers reached Madrid at eleven o'clock in the morning of May 18th, 1764.

Beaumarchais found his sisters surrounded by their friends. After the first greetings were over, he asked for an exact and detailed account of everything that had happened. The narrative convinced him that his sister was in no way to blame for her misfortune. He rose from his chair, and, taking her in his arms, said :

"Now that I know everything, my child, you can be easy. I am glad to see that you no longer love this man :

that makes my way so much the clearer. Tell me where I can find him."

All present advised him to go first to the ambassador at Aranjuez, for their enemy had strong protectors.

"Very well, friends; be good enough to order a travelling carriage for me, and to-morrow morning I will go to Court to pay my respects to the ambassador. In the meantime, however, I must make a few necessary enquiries. All that you can do to help me is to keep my arrival secret until my return from Aranjuez."

Thereupon, Beaumarchais hurriedly changed his clothes, and set out for the dwelling of the Keeper of the Crown Archives, Joseph Clavijo, his sister's unsatisfactory lover. He was not at home, having just gone to pay a visit to a lady. Beaumarchais hastened to the address indicated, and found him with other guests in the drawing room. Without making himself known, he drew his man aside, and told him he had just arrived from France, and was charged with several commissions for him. When could he receive him? Clavijo invited him to take chocolate with him at 9 o'clock on the following morning. Beaumarchais accepted the invitation for himself and the merchant who had accompanied him.

On the morrow, the 19th May, Beaumarchais presented himself at 8.30. It was a splendid house, which belonged, Clavijo informed him, to Don Antonio Portuguès, one of the King's most honoured ministers, who allowed him to live there during his absence.

Beaumarchais opened the interview by saying that he had been asked by a society of men of letters to establish a literary correspondence with the most eminent savants and literary men of the Spanish towns through which he happened to pass during his visit, and he felt he could not do better than address himself, in the first instance, to the brilliant and learned author of the *Pensador*, with whom he now had the honour of speaking.

Whilst Clavijo beamed and expanded under these compliments, Beaumarchais watched him narrowly to discover the kind of man with whom he had to deal. In replying, the Spaniard's eyes kindled with pleasure, his voice took on quite an affectionate tone, and "he spoke like an angel" of a project so well calculated to flatter his

vanity and to further his ambition. He was a clever fellow, and as determined as Beaumarchais himself to make his way in the world.

Not to be outdone in courtesy, he concluded his discourse by putting his services at the disposition of his guest in every possible way.

Promptly taking him at his word, Beaumarchais said he would make no secret of the real object of his visit, and, as his friend was aware of what he was going to say, asked that he might be present whilst he said it.

Clavijo readily agreed to the request, though he glanced at the speaker's taciturn companion with some curiosity.

Without further delay Beaumarchais began :

" A certain French merchant, with a large family, and in modest circumstances, had nevertheless considerable business relations with Spain. The head of a rich Spanish commercial house, happening to be in Paris, nine or ten years ago, proposed to the Frenchman, who had been his friend and correspondent for many years, that he should take two of his daughters with him to Madrid, and put them in charge of his business, under his personal direction, with a view to their inheriting the establishment upon his death. He was a bachelor of advanced age, and had no living relatives.

" The proposal was accepted, and the eldest daughter, who was already married, and one of her sisters, proceeded to Madrid and were duly installed in the Spanish merchant's house, which now worked in closer collaboration with the father's business in Paris.

" Two years later the Spaniard died, leaving his affairs in an unexpectedly embarrassed condition. But by dint of hard work and much ability the young Frenchwomen succeeded in putting the business on a sound footing.

" About this time a young man from the Canary Islands was introduced into the house."

At these words Clavijo started, and his face lengthened.

" In spite of his poverty," calmly proceeded Beaumarchais, " the ladies, seeing in him an ardent student of French and the sciences, kindly helped him to such purpose that he made rapid progress in his studies, and he confided to them his ambitions."

Now, the man who makes a *confidante* of a woman

masters her more often than she masters him. Clavijo understood women, and this is precisely what happened in his relations with the younger sister.

"The Spaniard proposed marriage, and interviewed the elder lady on the subject.

"'When you are in a position suitably to provide for a wife,' replied the elder sister, 'I shall not refuse my consent, if my sister gives you the preference over other suitors.'"

Clavijo moved nervously in his chair.

"The younger," continued Beaumarchais, "touched by the merit of the man who sought her, rejected several offers of marriage in his favour, preferring to wait until the man who loved her had justified the high opinion which his friends entertained of his ability. She entered whole-heartedly into his plans for the future, and encouraged him in his first literary enterprises. His first publication was a journal called the *Pensador*."

At these words Clavijo trembled, and the blood left his cheeks.

"The work had a prodigious success," coldly pursued the speaker. "The King himself, delighted with this charming production, bestowed marked favours upon its author, and promised him the first suitable post which fell vacant.

"The young man now paid open court to his mistress, and everybody understood the lovers awaited only the promised appointment to be married.

"After six months of assiduous attentions the man received the appointment, and fled."

Clavijo breathed with difficulty, and vainly sought to hide his confusion.

"The affair had caused too much commotion to be treated with indifference. The ladies had moved into a larger house, capable of holding two families. The banns had been published. This public insult revolted the friends of both parties. The French Ambassador interfered. On seeing that the Frenchwomen commanded stronger protection than his own, and fearing to ruin his rising fortunes, the man returned to throw himself at the feet of his incensed mistress. He employed the good offices of his friends to secure her pardon, and as the anger

of a betrayed woman is usually only hidden love, everything was forgiven. The preparations for the marriage were resumed, the banns again published, and the ceremony was widely advertised to take place in three days' time. The reconciliation had made no less stir than the rupture. After commending his affianced bride, in tender words, to the care of their common friends, the young man set out for Saint-Hildephonse to ask his chief's consent to get married."

Fixing his eyes sternly on the wretched man before him, Beaumarchais continued in a rising voice :

" He came back, in effect, two days later ; but instead of leading his victim to the altar, he sent word to the unhappy girl that he had changed his mind and did not intend to marry her. When her friends went to him to demand an explanation, he defied them to do their worst, and said that, if these helpless Frenchwomen in a foreign country attempted to worry him, he would ruin them both.

" At this news the poor girl fell into convulsions, and became so ill that fears were entertained for her life. In their despair the elder sister wrote to her brother in France, telling him of the public insult which had been put upon them. This letter so affected her brother that, instantly demanding leave of absence, he left country, business, family, pleasures, everything, to come and avenge in Spain his innocent and unhappy sister, to unmask a traitor and write his infamy in letters of blood on his face. . . .

" *I am that brother ! . . . You are that traitor !* "

Clavijo almost collapsed. He tried to murmur some excuses.

" Do not interrupt me, sir ! " commanded Beaumarchais ; " you have nothing to tell me and much to hear. To begin with, have the goodness to declare before this gentleman, who has come expressly from France with me, whether by any lack of affection or faithfulness, or faults of conduct or temper, my sister has deserved the double outrage which she has suffered at your hands."

" No, sir, I fully recognize that your sister Dona Maria is a young lady full of wit, grace and virtue."

" She has given you no cause for complaint so long as you have known her ? "

" Never."

Springing to his feet, Beaumarchais said :

" Then why, monster, have you had the barbarity to drag her down, solely because she gave you the preference over half a dozen better and richer men than you ! "

" Ah, sir ! I was urged on by others. There were instigations, counsels—if you only knew ! "

" That is enough ! "

Turning to his friend Beaumarchais said : " You have heard my sister's vindication, go and publish it. What I have now to say to this gentleman needs no witness." His friend left the house. Between fear and astonishment Clavijo attempted to break off the interview ; but Beaumarchias compelled him to resume his seat.

" Now that we are alone, sir, this is my proposal, and I hope it will meet with your approval :

" You cannot suppose that I have come here to play the part of a brother in a comedy, who desires at all costs to get his sister married. It happens to suit my arrangements as well as your own that you should not marry her ; but you have wantonly outraged a woman of honour because you thought her helpless and unprotected in a foreign land. That is the action of a blackguard and a coward. You have now to declare in writing, with all doors open and in the presence of your servants, that you are a thoroughly dishonourable fellow, and have deceived, betrayed and insulted my sister without any justification whatever. The declaration will be in French, so that the servants will not understand. You will then sign the document, hand it to me, and I shall show it to our ambassador. I shall next have the declaration printed and circulated at Court and in every part of the town. In short, I shall do everything in my power to make you lose your place, and shall pursue you constantly and relentlessly until my sister's resentment is appeased and she herself tells me to stop."

" I will never sign such a declaration," said Clavijo, in a voice shaken by emotion.

" I can well believe you, for if I were in your place I should perhaps not do so either. Whether you sign or refuse to sign, however, is all the same to me. But unless you do so, from this moment I shall stay with you ; I shall never leave you ; where you go I will go, until in sheer

desperation you come to deliver yourself of my presence behind the royal palace of Buenretiro. If fortune favours me I shall take my sister in my arms, put her in my carriage, and take her straight back to Paris, without seeing the ambassador or speaking of our affair to anybody. If, on the contrary, fortune favours you, so much the worse for me: I have made my will. You will have every advantage over us; you will be able to laugh at our expense. Order breakfast to be served."

And Beaumarchais coolly walked to the bell and rang. A servant entered with the chocolate. Beaumarchais took his cup and sipped it, whilst Clavijo paced the room in silence. After a long interval the Spaniard made up his mind, and turning to his visitor, said:

"M. de Beaumarchais, listen to me. Nothing can possibly excuse my conduct towards your sister. Ambition was my undoing; but if I had known that Dona Maria had such a brother as you, far from regarding her as a lonely foreign girl, I should have looked for the greatest advantage from our union. What you have said has given me the greatest respect for you, and I implore you to do all you can to repair, as far as possible, the injury I have done to your sister. Give her back to me, sir, and I shall be the happiest of men to receive from you both my wife and pardon for the wrong I have done."

"It is too late. My sister no longer loves you. All you have to do now is to sign the declaration."

After much ado and whining attempts to get its terms softened, Clavijo, either from fear of the alternative, or in the hope of gaining time, and perhaps winning back the woman who had loved him, swallowed his pride, wrote and signed in the presence of Beaumarchais and his own servants the following document:

"I, the undersigned, Joseph Clavijo, Keeper of the Crown Archives, acknowledge that, after having been received with all kindness into the house of Mme. Guilbert, I deceived Mlle. Caron, her sister, under promise of marriage many times repeated, and that I broke my troth, without any excuse of fault or weakness on her part, that, on the contrary, the propriety of this young lady (for whom I have the greatest respect) has always been above reproach. I acknowledge that by my indiscreet

conduct, the levity of my conversation, and the construction which might have been placed upon it, I have openly insulted this virtuous young lady, of whom I hereby freely and willingly ask pardon, although I acknowledge myself to be in every way unworthy of obtaining it. I promise her every kind of reparation which she may desire, if the present method is not agreeable to her.

"Drawn up at Madrid, by my own hand, in the presence of her brother, 19th May, 1764.

"Signed: JOSEPH CLAVIJO."

Taking the document, Beaumarchais warned the Spaniard that he intended to make the fullest possible use of the declaration, and that henceforth he must be looked upon as his declared enemy.

Clavijo begged that, before publishing his humiliation, Beaumarchais would allow him to make one more attempt to induce Dona Maria to forgive him. The wily Spaniard already knew his man, and approached him on the weak side of his vanity and good-nature. Clavijo (clearly a born actor) implored him, with tears in his voice, to act as his mediator with his sister. Beaumarchais refused. He finally consented, however, not to dishonour Clavijo publicly until after his return from Aranjuez.

The French Ambassador, the Marquis d'Ossun, after listening to his compatriot's recital, and complimenting him upon the ability with which he had conducted the affair, nevertheless, strongly advised him to overcome his sister's repugnance, and take advantage of the Spaniard's contrite mood to get the young couple promptly married, for, if he was any judge of men, Clavijo would go far. And, in any case, the less publicity given to such delicate matters the better for all parties.

Rather unsettled by M. d'Ossun's advice, Beaumarchais, on returning to Madrid, found that Clavijo had already made some headway with his sisters, and concluded that he, too, knew something about women—"soft, sensitive creatures, whose hearts are easily moved in favour of the repentant lover who knows exactly how much boldness to blend with his humility when returning to sigh at their feet."

Directly he heard that Beaumarchais had returned,

Clavijo set himself to win his confidence, and such was the charm of his conversation and manners that in a few days the pair became on quite friendly terms.

On May 25th the Spaniard, without warning, suddenly disappeared from the house of M. Portuguès, and took refuge with an officer of his acquaintance. Fearing some fresh change of front, Beaumarchais immediately sought him out in his new lodging. In explanation of his action, Clavijo said that, by moving, he had thought to give his friends convincing proof of his sincerity, since his late host was strongly opposed to his marriage. So far from blaming him, Beaumarchais told him that the motive of his removal did credit to the delicacy of his feelings. His heart warmed towards his late enemy.

The next day he received from Clavijo a dignified and apparently quite sincere letter, repeating his desire to marry Mlle. Caron, "if the past unhappy misunderstandings have not irretrievably alienated her from me;" and urgently requesting him to do his utmost to bring about a reconciliation. As a last favour, he begged that Beaumarchais himself would go to M. Grimaldi, his chief, to secure his consent to the marriage.

On reading the letter to his sisters, Marie-Louise burst into tears.

"Well, well, my child, you love him still and you are ashamed, are you not? I can see it for myself. Well, so be it, since you are no longer angry with him. You are none the less a good, kind girl. This Clavijo," he added, laughing, "is a monster, like most men; but, such as he is, I advise you to pardon him. For my own sake I should have liked it better if he had fought; for your sake I am glad that he did not."

His bantering words caused her to smile through her tears, and taking this for a tacit consent, he hurried off to fetch Clavijo, telling him on the way that he was a hundred times luckier fellow than he had any right to be. The Spaniard agreed with him so cordially that he ended by charming everybody, and the lovers were reconciled on the spot. In his excitement, Clavijo crossed to Mme. Guilbert's desk, and, taking out pen and paper, for a few moments sat writing. Then, in the presence of the whole company, including a secretary of the Polish Embassy, the

Spanish Consul at Bayonne, and other well-known people, he gracefully presented what he had written, on bended knee, to his mistress, with the request that she would add her signature to his own. The document ran as follows :

" We, the undersigned, Joseph Clavijo and Marie-Louise Caron, have hereby renewed our oft-repeated vow to belong only to each other, and we undertake to sanctify this solemn promise by the sacrament of marriage with the least possible delay ; in testimony whereof we have mutually drawn up and signed this document. At Madrid, 26th May, 1764.

" Signed : MARIE-LOUISE CARON and JOSEPH CLAVIJO."

The company then gave themselves up to the enjoyments of a delightful evening, and had not yet separated when, at eleven o'clock, Beaumarchais set out for Aranjuez, travelling by night in order to avoid the heat of the day.

M. Grimaldi readily assented to the marriage, remarking that Clavijo might have saved his visitor a journey, for all that was necessary in such cases was to write to the minister. Beaumarchais at once took upon himself the responsibility for this irregularity of procedure, on the ground that he wished to pay his respects before begging him to grant a few audiences on other subjects of importance.

On reaching home, he found a letter from Clavijo awaiting him, protesting bitterly against an abominable libel, which he alleged had just been issued, and implying that Beaumarchais was responsible for its appearance. He enclosed a copy of the slander (in his own handwriting throughout), with the request that he would have printed and circulated the promise he had last signed, in order to refute these baseless slurs upon his honour. In the meantime, until the public were disabused, he dared not show himself, and suggested the desirability of their not meeting for a few days.

Beaumarchais at once proceeded to his house, and found him in bed. After gently reproaching the invalid for so readily believing ill of him, Beaumarchais, in order to

pacify him, promised that, as soon as he was well, he would take him everywhere and treat him publicly as his brother. They next agreed upon the final arrangements for the marriage, and the following day formal visits were paid to the grand vicar and the apostolic notary. Beaumarchais was so pleased with the happy turn in his sister's affairs that, upon his return to the bedside of the sick man, he cordially embraced him, and, knowing his straitened circumstances, said that he would take it as a brotherly act if his friend would accept his purse, containing about 9,000 livres, and a little choice jewellery and lace, so that he might be in a position to offer his bride a suitable present. The Spaniard accepted the jewellery and the lace, but refused the money.

The next day the purse, with a further sum of money just drawn from the banker, a roll of valuable lace, all his silk stockings, and several gold-embroidered vests, were stolen from Beaumarchais by a quadroon valet, whom he had taken into his service at Bayonne.

Beaumarchais at once reported the theft to the commandant of Madrid, and was much surprised at the extreme coolness of his reception.

Clavijo received the news of the accident with admirable philosophy, and assured his friend that he would never see either the valet or his goods again. Beaumarchais wrote to the ambassador, informing him of his loss, and promptly dismissed the incident from his mind.

During the next few days the relations between the two friends became closer than ever. But when Beaumarchais called on June 5th, he was astonished to be informed that the Spaniard had again abruptly changed his lodging.

After an active search over every quarter of the town, the new retreat of the elusive lover was at length discovered. Again he met the reproaches of Beaumarchais with the most plausible excuses, but firmly rejected the suggestion that he should come and live with his friend and his sisters until after the wedding.

At last, in order to allay the doubts which had again arisen in Marie-Louise's mind, Beaumarchais sent to the apostolic notary, on June 7th, for the authorization of the ceremony. What was his amazement to be informed by this official that the wedding was being opposed by a

young woman who, nine years before, had received a promise of marriage from the bridegroom, and that he had just made Clavijo sign a declaration admitting the claim.

Beaumarchais found that the woman was a chambermaid. Mad with rage and humiliation, he ran to Clavijo's apartments.

"This promise of marriage comes from you," he exclaimed. "It was concocted yesterday. You are an utter scoundrel. I would not trust my sister to you for all the wealth of the Indies! This evening I am going to Aranjuez to tell M. Grimaldi of your infamy; and, far from opposing your marriage on my sister's behalf, I shall demand as my sole vengeance that you be compelled to marry your chambermaid forthwith. I will do everything I can (even to supplying her *dot*) to help her pursue you to the altar. Then, you will be caught in your own trap. You will be dishonoured, and I shall be avenged."

"My dear brother," said Clavijo imperturbably, "pray suspend your resentment and your journey until to-morrow. I have had nothing to do with this unfortunate business. It is true that I was formerly desperately in love with the pretty chambermaid of Mme. Portuguès, and promised to marry her, but since our rupture nothing more has been said. I speak to you as one man of the world to another. Your sister's enemies are behind this girl. Believe me, my friend, to buy her off is only a matter of a few golden pistoles. I will take you to a well-known lawyer, who will soon settle this little affair. Come to see me again at eight o'clock this evening."

With bitterness in his heart and indecision in his mind, Beaumarchais had, nevertheless, to accept this explanation. Was the man a rascal? Yet, what could be his aim in playing with him? He decided to suspend his judgment. Accompanied by two friends, he kept the appointment agreed upon.

Clavijo had fled.

Beaumarchais had scarcely reached home when a courier delivered a letter from the ambassador at Aranjuez, advising him that Clavijo, "fearing your violence, has lodged a criminal complaint against you for having, a few days ago, at the point of a pistol, compelled him, in his own house, to sign an engagement to marry your sister."

The missive concluded by advising him, as he valued his safety, to abstain from all further aggressive words or acts until he had seen the writer. Beaumarchais read the note with consternation. He had been tricked.

At that moment an officer of the Walloon guards entered the room : " Monsieur de Beaumarchais, you have not a minute to lose. To-morrow morning you will be arrested in your bed. The order is issued. I have come to warn you. The man is a rascal. He has turned everybody against you. Fly instantly ! "

" I would rather die," stoutly declared Beaumarchais ; and ordering a carriage with six mules to be at the door at four o'clock in the morning, he bade farewell to his family and retired to his room. For some time he felt absolutely nonplussed : his body without energy and his mind a blank. Gradually recovering his tranquillity, however, he sat down and wrote, " like a man in a fever," the detailed account of all he had done since his arrival in Spain, as summarized in the foregoing narrative. He was still writing when interrupted by the arrival of his conveyance. He at once set out for Aranjuez.

M. d'Ossun granting him an immediate audience, the ambassador listened to all he had to say, but, whilst commiserating with him upon his misfortune, said frankly that it was hopeless to attempt to bring his enemy to justice. The Court and the whole town had been stirred up against him, and the best advice he could give him was to take the road to France without a moment's delay. All the pleadings of Beaumarchais would be in vain.

Such was his agitation on leaving M. d'Ossun that Beaumarchais, unable to rest, passed the remainder of the night in wandering through the park. Recovering his spirits with the dawn, he determined not to be beaten.

Whilst waiting to interview M. Grimaldi, he happened to encounter M. Whal,* who had recently retired, after a long and honourable career in the most important offices of the Crown. Knowing him to be a good friend of France, Beaumarchais asked to be allowed a few minutes' private conversation with him on some very urgent business. M. Whal courteously led him into his room, and Beaumarchais

* Richard Wall (1694-1778), an Irish soldier and statesman in the Spanish service.

told him the whole story, showing all the autograph documents in support of his case. At the end of the narrative, the old courtier rose from his chair, took his visitor's hand, and said :

" You may rest assured that the King will do you justice. It was I who recommended Clavijo for the office he holds, for I saw that he was a man of great ability. But ability without probity is a misfortune ; and I will never allow it to be said that I protect a person who has proved himself to be a scoundrel. Since I recommended him to the King, I owe it to myself to see that the post is placed in worthier hands."

M. Whal, thereupon, ordered his carriage, and drove with Beaumarchais to the palace, and, entering the royal apartments, told the King the circumstances which compelled him to ask for the dismissal of his *protégé*. The King expressed a wish to see the young Frenchman who had carried through this hazardous enterprise with such energy and resolution ; and, when Beaumarchais was admitted, requested him to read his memoir. He was so much impressed by the narrative that he ordered Clavijo forthwith to be deprived of his office, and the next day asked to have a copy of the journal and the documents which had been read to him at the audience on the previous day.

Clavijo was evidently one of those people who spend much of their time in making resolutions which they immediately begin to regret—and their afterthoughts are commonly wiser than their actions.

When he heard of his disgrace, he took refuge in a Capucin monastery, whence he wrote a letter in which he expressed his sorrow for himself with great eloquence, and professed to the last his astonishment at the cruel and unmerited punishment he had received at the hands of a man who he thought was his friend. Before leaving Spain, Beaumarchais, the least resentful of men, made several vain attempts to secure his rehabilitation, for, he says, " I no longer hated him ; in fact, I have never hated anybody." And that, we believe, is the truth, though, to be sure, magnanimity comes easier to the victor than to the vanquished.

CHAPTER VI

IN OLD MADRID

IT was not until February, 1774, ten years after the event, that Beaumarchais made public his account of the adventure with Clavijo, in his fourth Memoir against Goëzman—his enemies having had the maladdress to give him an opening by issuing a lying version of the affair. Allowing for his natural flamboyancy and his instinctive dramatization of everything that happened to him, the authenticity of the narrative in all essential details can no longer be contested; and that he actually wrote it at the time of the occurrence is proved by family papers which have come down to us. His father, for instance, addressed him from Paris, on the 5th June, 1764:

"How deeply I appreciate, my dear Beaumarchais, the happiness of being the father of a son whose deeds crown so gloriously the end of my career! I saw at the first glance how much your generous action must conduce to the honour of my dear Lisette. Oh, my dear boy, what a fine wedding-present the declaration of Clavijo is for her! If one may judge of the cause by the effect, he must have been scared out of his wits. Assuredly, I would never sign such a document for all the empire of Mahmoud joined to that of Trebizond: it covers you with glory and him with shame.

"I have received by the same post two letters from my charming Comtesse.* One for me and one for Julie—beautiful, touching letters, full of tender expressions for me and honourable for you. You have enchanted her; she hardly ceases to talk of her pleasure in knowing you,

* The Comtesse de Fuen-Clara, an elderly and influential lady of the Spanish Court, with whom he had business relations.

of her desire to help you, and of her joy at seeing how all the Spaniards approve and praise your action respecting Clavijo. She could not be more appreciative if you belonged to her own family. Pray do not neglect her. Adieu, my dear Beaumarchais, my honour, my glory, my crown, the joy of my heart ; accept a thousand caresses from the most affectionate of fathers and the best of thy friends."

The reference in this letter to a wedding present is in connection with a second offer of marriage which Marie-Louise received at this time from a Frenchman settled in Madrid, named Durand, who was one of the companions of Beaumarchais in hunting down Clavijo.

Marie-Louise Caron was thirty-three at the time of the Clavijo adventure, a fact which may perhaps help to explain the coyness of her lover. Beaumarchais, in his narrative, certainly implies that she was a younger woman, and may have been impelled to this little deception by the fear that if his readers knew the exact truth, they might think his sister was old enough to know better. But is anybody ever old enough to know better ? On the other hand, she is reputed to have been both witty and good-looking. She never married. On her return to France she is believed to have retired with her eldest sister to the convent of Les Dames de la Croix at Roye, but her later history is obscure. A grandson of Beaumarchais vaguely recollected having heard that she died in America, but there is no definite information on the point. Even the year of her death is uncertain, although it probably took place before 1775.

As for Clavijo, he lived to become a distinguished man of letters, to see himself represented on the stage as the villain of a melodrama by Goethe, to translate Buffon into Spanish, and to be Vice-Director of the Royal Institute of Natural History. He died in 1806.

The Clavijo episode lasted less than a month, and it was no sooner satisfactorily concluded than we find Beaumarchais in the thick of half a dozen great commercial enterprises, such as the floating of a company with the object of capturing the contracts for the provisionment of all the troops in Spain, Majorca, and the settlements on

the north coast of Africa, involving a sum of not less than twenty million francs a year. At the moment of concluding the bargain the scheme broke down, mainly owing to the timidity and inertia of his Spanish associates in the transaction. Then he had plans for securing on behalf of a French company a trading monopoly with Louisiana modelled on the India Company, for the exploitation of the Sierra Morena, for providing all the Spanish towns with white bread, and all the Spanish colonies with black slaves. He was ready for anything and everything. His energy was inexhaustible. He spent his days in planning vast and complicated financial combinations, and his evenings in a round of gaieties and frivolities, without ever allowing the pleasures of the night to interfere with the business of the morning. He was welcomed everywhere, fêted everywhere. Yet he found time to badger the ministers in the interests of his various schemes, to frequent the fashionable *salons*, to make love, to study the theatre, the literature, the manners and customs of Spain, to play the harp and sing at amateur concerts, to compose new settings for old songs or new words for old settings.

"Truly," he writes to his father, "with my head upon my pillow, I laugh when I think how nicely the things of this world fit into each other ; how odd and diverse are the ways of fortune ; and how, above all, in the whirl of affairs, the mind superior to events rejoices at the clash of interests, pleasures, sorrows, which dash and break against it."

Beaumarchais had not been in Spain more than a month when he became on the best possible terms with a lady whose beauty and accomplishments were the delight of the diplomatic world in Madrid. His biographers, more careful of her reputation than the lady herself, refer to her as the Marquise de la C—— ; but after a discreet interval of over a century the veil of anonymity was withdrawn. In Madrid she was known as the Marquise de la Croix, the wife of a lieutenant-general of artillery in the service of the Spanish king, and a near relative of Monseigneur de Jarente, Bishop of Orleans. She may or may not have been a genuine marquise, and was possibly the same person in whose company M. de Sartine had so

often caught Beaumarchais in Paris. If the latter surmise is correct, her presence in Madrid was doubtless a powerful incentive to Beaumarchais to fly to the aid of his sister. However this may be, Madame de la Croix was received in the best society, and her musical and social talents were very much in request.

Beaumarchais was never backward in making himself at home, and in August we find him addressing his private correspondence from her apartments. On the 12th of that month, whilst writing to his father, the Marquise bent over the back of his chair, and insisted on his telling the old man something about her. He complied in these terms:

"In the room where I am writing there is a great and exceedingly beautiful lady, the very dear friend of your Comtesse [Madame de Fuen-Clara], who makes fun of you and me all day long. She tells me, for example, that she thanks you for the kindness you did her thirty-three years ago, when you laid the foundations of the delightful acquaintanceship which I opened with her two months ago. I assure her that I will not fail to tell you this, and I do so at once, for what is only a little joke on her part justly gives me as much pleasure as if she really thought it."

At this point the fair Marquise took his pen to interpolate:

"I think it, I feel it, and I swear it, sir."

Beaumarchais, having recovered his pen, proceeds:

"Do not fail, then, through bashfulness, to thank Her Excellency, in your first letter, for her thanks, and still more for the kindness with which she overwhelms me. I admit that, without the lure of such a charming association, my Spanish business would be full of bitterness."

In his reply, dated the 1st September, old Caron keeps up the banter:

"Though you have a thousand times given me cause to congratulate myself for taking so much trouble on your behalf thirty-three years ago, if I had then foreseen the happiness it would procure you of being able to amuse her fair Excellency, who does me the honour of thanking me for it, I should have done my best to render you still more amiable in her beautiful eyes. Beg her to allow me to

express my deepest respect for her, and offer her my services in Paris. I should be overjoyed at the happiness of being useful to her here. Since she is the friend of my dear Countess, I beg her to be so kind as to express to her my respectful attachment."*

In the end, the Marquise caught the fancy of the Prince of the Asturias, the heir to the throne. Beaumarchais, with all his good qualities, was never over delicate in love, and we find him, shortly before leaving Spain for ever, acting with great spirit the part of Figaro in real life, by helping his Rosine into the arms of this princely Almaviva.

At this time, also, Beaumarchais used his credit to obtain the post of Engineer to the King for his brother-in-law Guilbert, and maintained an uninterrupted and exceedingly lively correspondence with his family in Paris. Moreover, he tactfully but firmly collected his father's overdue accounts from various members of the Spanish Court, and throughout the whole period of his absence took an active interest in the affairs of all his sisters.

Several of his letters in this connection are concerned with the establishment of his fifth sister, known to her intimates as "Janette," or "Tonton," and more formally as Mlle. Jeanne Marguérite de Boisgarnier, a name she had adopted when Pierre Augustin became M. de Beaumarchais. She was an elegant and piquantly humorous little person, who had for long disdainfully kept at her heels an unfortunate admirer, named Octave Janot de Miron, a parliamentary advocate, and friend of the family of several years' standing. He was very much in love with her, or would scarcely have supported so complacently the tendency of both brother and sisters to make him the butt of their wit. At last, feeling that he was being trifled with, he wrote an exceedingly cutting letter to Beaumarchais in Madrid. The reply was not calculated to allay his irritation, for Pierre Augustin wrote in anger, and one angry man is as good as another. Mlle. de Boisgarnier further wounded the lover's vanity by taking her brother's part. But Beaumarchais had no sooner dispatched his

* Loménie (L. de), *Beaumarchais et son temps*, v. I., p. 30 *et seq.*

letter than he was ashamed of it, and immediately wrote to his father pleading his friend's cause :—

"14th January, 1765.

"Sir and dearest Father,

"I have received your last letter, dated the 31st December, and that of Boisgarnier. Her reply has given me great pleasure. I see that she is an odd creature, with much wit and an honest mind ; but if I am in any way responsible for the coldness between her and her admirer, and if what passed between the Doctor and me is the cause of their disagreement, I say in advance that I have quite recovered from my resentment, and if she persists in hers, she must do so on her own account alone. Whatever opinion this friend has of me, whatever kind of comparison he makes between his own qualities and mine, I shall not quarrel with him. The only thing capable of upsetting me is that he should speak ill of my heart ; he is welcome to think as little as he pleases of my wit : the first will always be at his service, the second always ready to flay him when he deserves it. When I tell him the truth about himself, it is always without bitterness : I have no wish to offend him. Has not everybody his twist ?

"So far from learning with pleasure that our friends do not get on together, I am sorry, for Miron lacks none of the solid qualities which make for the happiness of a good woman ; and if my Boisgarnier is less touched by these than repelled by the want of a few frivolous accomplishments (which, moreover, he has in some degree), I would say that Boisgarnier is a ninny, who has not yet learnt by experience to prefer happiness to pleasure. To say exactly what I think, he is quite right to compare himself favourably with me in many things in which I feel I have neither his virtue nor his constancy ; and these things are of great price where a lifelong union is concerned.

"I, therefore, beg my Boisgarnier to consider only what is so infinitely praiseworthy in our friend, and soon it will be all plain sailing again.

"For twenty-four hours I was furious with him ; but, apart from his profession, there is not a man whom I

would prefer to be my associate or my brother-in-law. I know what Boisgarnier will say. Yes, but he plays the hurdy-gurdy (it is true); his heels are half an inch too high; he narrowly escapes being in tune when he sings; he eats raw apples in the evening, and takes equally raw injections in the morning; he is frigid and didactic when he chats; he has a certain clumsiness in everything he does . . . but a wig, waistcoat, or goloshes are not reasons for driving a man away if he has an excellent heart and a cultivated mind. The good people of the Rue de Condé ought to be governed by other principles.

"Adieu, Boisgarnier; there is a long paragraph for you!"*

The lovers were reconciled, and in 1767, having received a suitable dowry from her brother, Mlle. de Boisgarnier was married to M. de Miron, who was later appointed, by the influence of his brother-in-law, private secretary to the Prince de Conti.

Mme. de Miron became the centre of a society of artists and men of letters. It was in her house that the Abbé Delille read much of his unpublished verse; and it was here, in 1770, that her brother met his Boswell, Paul Philippe Gudin de la Brenellerie. She was an accomplished amateur actress, and played the chief rôle in many of the farces which her brother wrote for the entertainment of his fellow-guests at the seat of his friend, M.Lenormand d'Étioles, the accommodating husband of Mme. de Pompadour. Mme. de Miron died in 1773, leaving one daughter, who distinguished herself by her literary and musical ability, and became known as the "Muse of Orleans," when she settled in that town upon her marriage.

During the whole period of his sojourn in Spain there was no society in which Beaumarchais received a warmer welcome than that of the diplomatic corps. The British Ambassador, Lord Rochford, was his particular friend, and the pair, sometimes accompanied by Mme. de la Croix, spent many a pleasant hour at the diplomat's house, singing to each other the folk-songs of Spain and their own compositions. His relations with the Russian Ambassador, the Comte de Buturlin, and his very pretty wife,

* See Loménie, v. 1., pp. 56-58.

were scarcely less cordial, though the friendship was not uninterrupted. The trouble arose out of a gambling debt.

Games of chance never had much attraction for Beaumarchais, but one evening after supper at their house he was persuaded by his hosts, against his will, to take a hand at cards. At the end of the game he had won five hundred livres from the Count and fifteen hundred livres from his wife. From that day this particular game was never again played, the ambassador proposing that they should play faro instead. Beaumarchais steadily refused. Meanwhile, not a word was said of the two thousand livres owing to him. About a week later Beaumarchais was present when the Count won one hundred louis, still without attempting to settle his debt. Annoyed at this negligence, Beaumarchais said, in the hearing of everybody :

"If the Count will lend me this money, I'll play him at faro."

M. de Buturlin, unable to decline the request, passed over the hundred louis he had just won. Beaumarchais held the bank, and within an hour lost all the borrowed money. He rose from the table and said, laughing :

"My dear Count, we are quits !"

"Yes, but you can no longer say you do not play faro, and in the future we hope you will not break up the company."

"For a few louis, with all my heart ; but not for banks of one hundred louis."

"But this one did not cost you much."

"That is as much as could be said if I had to do with a bad debtor."

Thereupon the Countess broke off the altercation. Mme. de la Croix asked him to give her his arm, and they left the house together. Nevertheless, Beaumarchais still regularly visited the Count, though on a rather more formal basis, and to please his hosts played a game or two on each occasion. One night he won twenty louis, and put the whole sum on two cards. Both won. Fortune continued to smile on him, and at length he broke the bank of two hundred louis. The Chevalier de Guzman at once set up another bank, and begging that none would leave, dared Beaumarchais to break that also. Having won so

much, he felt obliged to take up the challenge. Everybody in the room crowded round the table to watch the play. Putting aside fifty louis for the new game, he returned the rest of his winnings to the bank, hoping by this generous action to be excused from playing again. His luck held, and two hours later he went home with five hundred louis in his pocket. Of this sum he lost one hundred and fifty the next day. Mme. de la Croix said that having made such an unprecedented sacrifice on his winnings, he ought to keep the rest. Acting on this suggestion, he was about to leave, when the Count said:

"Will you not try your luck against me, sir!"

"Sir," replied Beaumarchais, "I have lost rather heavily this evening."

"But you won a great deal last night," retorted the ambassador, with some warmth.

"Monsieur le Comte," answered Beaumarchais, "you know how little I care for money gained at cards; I played unwillingly, and won against all good sense; and you press me in this way only because you know that I play without skill and, therefore, at a great disadvantage."

"Egad!" cried the Count, "you can play well enough to win; and a good deal of this money was mine."

"Very well, Monsieur le Comte, how much did you lose?"

"A hundred and fifty louis."

"Then, I will stand to lose three hundred louis," said Beaumarchais, "for, apart from the hundred and fifty which I have returned to the bank, I will play you for a second hundred and fifty, at twenty-five louis on each deal."

Still Beaumarchais won; so when his opponent had lost two hundred louis, Pierre Augustin rose, and said:

"It is madness for me to go on playing: I shall ruin you."

"You do not mean to say you are going, sir? Play me for five hundred louis to give me a chance of recouping myself."

"No, Monsieur le Comte, some other day. It is four o'clock and time for bed."

"You were more polite yesterday with the Chevalier de Guzman."

"And it cost him five hundred louis. I am dreadfully sleepy. However, will you play me for the two hundred louis on one deal at *trente-et-quarante ?*"

"No," he replied, "at faro."

"Gentlemen," said Beaumarchais, with a deep bow, "I wish you good-evening."

Mme. de Buturlin, annoyed at her husband's losses, at this point intervened to tell Beaumarchais that his luck was superior to his manners. Now, a week before, at Lord Rochford's, she had taken Beaumarchais aside, and begged him with tears in her eyes to lend her thirty louis to pay a gambling debt. Although he himself was losing rather heavily at the time, and had not forgotten the affair of the two thousand livres, he immediately complied with her request, and she expressed herself deeply grateful to him for his kindness. But she had not returned the money.

On hearing her cutting remark, Beaumarchais looked her steadily in the eyes, and said :

"A week ago, madame, you complimented me in a contrary sense."

The countess blushed in her confusion and, with a profound bow, Beaumarchais left the house.

He swore he would never play again. He continued to frequent the Russians' house. He was coldly received, and not a word was said about paying their debt. At last Mme. de la Croix spoke of the matter to the Count's doctor, and told him exactly what she thought of the ambassador's conduct, and added, that unless he changed his behaviour she would tell him to his face what she was now saying, and all Spain should hear of it. The next day the doctor brought two hundred louis to Beaumarchais at the house of Mme. de la Croix, with whom he was dining. Greatly offended, she sent word that she would see the ambassador in the evening, and give him the lesson he deserved ; that he ought to have brought the money personally to Beaumarchais at home, and to offer his excuses for his sulkiness and slackness in paying. However, Beaumarchais took the two hundred louis ; but when the doctor asked for a receipt, Beaumarchais laughed at him, and sent a polite but piquant letter to the Count, well calculated to make him feel ashamed. Two hours

later the Countess came to Mme. de la Croix to offer an explanation and sent the doctor to Beaumarchais to reproach him for no longer going to see them, to which he replied that, in spite of his extreme regret to be deprived of their society, he did not think it seemly to visit a house when he had such just cause for complaint against its master.

The misunderstanding was speedily cleared up, and after some very flattering overtures from the ambassador and his wife, Beaumarchais paid them a formal visit of reconciliation. He was received with great ceremony, and, preceded by two pages, was shown into the reception room, where a concert was in progress. The Countess was at the harpsichord. She immediately rose, and leading the visitor to her husband, said that such friends ought not to fall out on account of a misunderstanding, and she hoped they would always remain on good terms.

"Monsieur de Beaumarchais," she added, "I am going to play the part of Annette; I hope you will give us the pleasure of taking the part of Lubin*; the Swedish envoy will be the lord of the manor, Prince Mezersky the bailiff; we are already rehearsing the piece." It was impossible to refuse such a courteous proposal, and the company forthwith proceeded to the harpsichord, and Beaumarchais was invited to sing Lubin's songs, the others following with as much of their parts as they could remember. They all spent a delightful musical evening, and good humour reigned once more.

"Let nobody ever speak to me of play again," says Beaumarchais in recounting the episode to his sister Julie: "I prefer to amuse myself with more lively pleasures."

At dessert, the Countess sent him a note containing four lines of verse, which made up in cordiality for what they lacked in technical skill. Her flattery pleased him immensely, and he was not afraid to show it. Everybody has his pet conceit. Those who are very critical of vanity in others rarely have any difficulty in finding excuses for their own. And, as Beaumarchais says, such honours are not to be met with every day of the week. He thoroughly enjoyed himself; his friends were more

* The lovers in Rousseau's opera *Le Devin du Village*.

charming than ever, and he was richer by 14,500 livres. He had every reason to be well satisfied with himself.*

Whilst in Madrid, Beaumarchais began a correspondence with Voltaire.

"I have received a letter from M. de Voltaire, "he wrote to his father; "he laughingly compliments me upon my thirty-two teeth, my gay philosophy, and my age. His letter is very good, but my own demanded just such a letter, and I think I might have written it myself. He wanted to know something about this country; but I shall reply in the words which M. de Caro used the other day to the Marquise d'Arissa at M. Grimaldi's, when she asked him what he thought of Spain:

"'Madame, I beg you to wait until I am out of the country before giving my reply: I am too sincere and too polite to give it in the house of a minister of the King.'"

In spite of his great social success, however, most, though not all of his commercial enterprises one after another fell to pieces like a house of cards. Those that remained he left in the charge of Durand. Yet when Beaumarchais returned to France at the end of March, 1765, his time and energy had not been wasted. He had gained invaluable experience in the conduct of huge business transactions; he had extended his knowledge of men and women; he had stored his mind with the songs, the dances, the colours, the manners and customs of that land of romance and sunshine; and, above all, he brought away with him the material out of which grew Figaro and Suzanne, Almaviva and Rosine, Cherubin and Fanchette, Bartholo, Bazile, Brid'oison—those original and joyous figures who were to add so greatly to the gaiety of nations and to establish their creator's chief claim to immortality.

* From a long letter to his sister Julie, dated 11th February, 1765.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF THE BEAUTIFUL CREOLE

BEAUMARCHAIS was a widower of twenty-eight when he made the acquaintance of Pauline Le B——, an orphan of eighteen. She was a Creole, born in San Domingo, and had been brought to Paris as a child to be educated and to live with a widowed aunt, who was a distant relative of the Caron family. In her native island she was mistress of a mansion and estate, of an estimated value of two million francs, but the property was heavily mortgaged, much neglected, and mismanaged by those into whose charge it had been committed, who moreover, were gravely suspected of dishonest administration. Pauline's fortune, therefore, consisted chiefly in great expectations, and she was in reality quite poor. All agree, however, that she was an exceedingly beautiful girl, with a charming voice, endearing ways, and an exceptionally gifted musician.

Soon after meeting the Caron family for the first time, Pauline and Julie developed for each other one of those passionate and romantic friendships so common among young people of the same sex. Under these circumstances, it was almost inevitable that Pauline should before long begin to take a more than ordinary interest in her friend's fascinating brother, who cut such a fine figure at court and in society. Pauline found it very delightful to sing whilst he accompanied her upon the harp, and he found it equally agreeable to see the light of welcome in her eyes whenever they met, and the shy, yet intimate, glances she gave him when in company. Beaumarchais indulged himself in these pleasures more and more frequently—and his adoring sisters did the rest. But in winning

Pauline's heart he lost his own, though not quite sufficiently to lose his head.

First of all he undertook to unravel the tangled skein of her affairs. He spoke to Mesdames on the matter, and obtained on her behalf their recommendation to M. de Clugny, Lord-Lieutenant of San Domingo.

But although his affection was now deeply engaged and his thoughts turned complacently towards matrimony, the small, still voice of arithmetic became ever more insistent. So, before committing himself to a formal proposal, he entrusted his uncle, Pichon de Villeneuve, with ten thousand francs, chartered a ship, filled her with a cargo of goods likely to be necessary for the restoration of the house and estate, and packed him off to San Domingo, with secret instructions to furnish him with an exact account of Pauline's assets and liabilities, and the possibilities of developing the property. These measures were taken in 1763.

It is only fair to add that before making the acquaintance of Pauline, Beaumarchais had himself acquired interests of some importance in the Island, which also needed attention, and that about this time he even contemplated settling there.*

Besides her aunt, the young Creole had one other relative in Paris, a rich uncle, a widower without children.

In his first letters to Pauline, we find the harassed Beaumarchais, for the second time in his career, engaged in the bewildering task of moderating the ardour of a young woman whose naïve passion had been excited by his philandering. His dear and amiable Pauline could not doubt that a sincere and durable attachment was the motive of all he had done for her, and if he had not yet formally asked for her hand, it was solely because all his available capital was being employed in putting her affairs on a satisfactory basis. He had, however, spoken to her uncle and flattered himself that his views had met with cordial approval. He had even ventured to tell the old gentleman he had every reason to think that, when the time came to explain his intentions more explicitly, his charming niece would not reject his suit. One thing alone restrained him—the fear that the money he had sunk in

* Lintilhac (É.), *Beaumarchais et ses œuvres*, p. 12.

her estate might be lost, and that he would then be unable to offer her the position in society to which she was entitled. He did not know what her expectations might be from her uncle, and did not think it delicate to invite a discussion on the subject either with her or her uncle. Such a procedure was repugnant to his character; he would not say another word on so distasteful a matter.

Nevertheless, he urged his dearest Pauline to consider that, in order to be happy, it is necessary to be without anxiety for the future. How very embarrassing it would be, for instance, if he had no sooner taken her to himself, than he should have cause to worry lest the capital, "of not less than eighty thousand francs," which he had sunk in her West Indian estates, should, by some misfortune, be lost! If, therefore, she was willing to accept his homage there were only two courses open to them: the first was to have patience until the money and exertions he had expended on her behalf had borne fruit; the second was to persuade her aunt to sound her uncle as to his intentions respecting his niece. Yet, far from desiring that the old gentleman should deprive himself in order to increase her well-being, Beaumarchais was always ready to sacrifice himself, if occasion should arise, to render this worthy relative's old age more agreeable. But since, after all, he was her uncle and could not take his money with him, when the time came to deplore the end of his honourable career, it would be more satisfactory to everybody to know exactly what they had to expect.

"My tenderness for you," he concluded, "will always have precedence of everything, even of my prudence. My fate is in your hands: yours in those of your uncle."

Pauline's reply shows that she was too much in love to appreciate the full significance of this none too flattering mixture of affection and ready reckoning. She flew to her uncle, and, finding him in a propitious mood, opened her heart to him. Pleased and touched by her confidence, the old gentleman was most sympathetic and said he would like to talk the matter over with her lover, for whom he expressed the highest esteem.

In her excitement, she immediately wrote to Beaumarchais, informing him of the result of her impulsiveness.

"You tell me," she wrote, "that your fate is in my

hands, and that mine is in the hands of my uncle. I, in my turn, make you the advocate of my interests. If you love me, as I believe you do, pass on to him a little of that endearing warmth : he complains of being tied down in advance. My dear, your heart and mind must work together in this conversation : nothing can resist you when you have set your mind on anything. Give me this proof of your tenderness. I shall look upon your success as the most convincing testimony of your eagerness for what you so prettily call your happiness. Your foolish Pauline could not read the dear words without the maddest beating of her heart. Adieu, my dear, I hope your first visit, on returning from Versailles, will be to my uncle. Remember all the deference you owe him, since he may become your own ! I must finish for I feel I am talking wildly. Good-night, you rascal ! "

In spite of her uncle's reluctance to agree to a formal engagement, it was understood that the marriage should take place as soon as the West Indian affairs were settled.

There are numerous gaps in the correspondence, but enough remains to reveal Pierre Augustin in nearly every phase of his character. Here we have him, after manœuvring Pauline into writing to him, treating her to a little personal philosoply :

" I thank you, my dearest Pauline, for your praise of my first letter ; but, surely, it had more success than you think. It touched your self-love ; the wish to expostulate leads necessarily to writing ; hence a letter for me. That is just what I wanted ; I am immensely gratified ; you have written to me first, for the letter of which you complain was not really a letter. The second was beside the question, since business demanded it. It follows that you have written to me first ; my self-love, that is as much as to say my love also, is satisfied, for the latter is but an extension of the former to include the beloved. We love ourselves in our mistress, in the judicious choice which justifies our good taste ; we love ourselves in the tenderness we lavish on her, which turns her heart toward us. There is only one way of regarding all the happiness and misfortune of my life : that is, as they affect you and me. Without this love of ourselves, no passion could enter into our souls. It is divinely ordained, and the love of a

charming fellow creature is so delightful only because it is an intimate emanation of self-love. Forgive me, my beloved Pauline, if I give myself rather the airs of a metaphysician ; I am forgetting myself, but what I say cannot be quite unintelligible to such an enlightened, perceptive, and upright mind. Do I not tell you, I will leave off ? I renounce the playful manner, since you desire a more serious expression of my feelings in order to indulge your engaging tenderness. . . .

"Listen, my beautiful girl, the pen ought to follow the lead of the sentiments implicitly : the man who reflects when he writes to his beloved is an impostor who deceives her. What matters it whether a letter is well turned ; its sentences well rounded : love tolerates no such restraints ; it begins a phrase which it thinks good, breaks off to begin another which seems better, then a third and warmer one, leaving the others incomplete. Disorder follows : through having too much to say, we say it badly. But this amiable confusion is sweet to the heart that can read between the lines. This epidemic malady triumphs over space and time, and is caught even by reading. We willingly share the charm of a disorder of which we know ourselves to be the first patient.

"My sweetheart says : 'When my beloved writes or talks business, he has plenty of common sense, his ideas are coherent, his conclusions follow his premises, every word goes straight to the mark ; but when he abandons his pen to the guidance of his poor heart, he begins quietly enough, then gets excited, wanders from his path, disdains to retrace his steps. Wholly given up to his object, it matters not what he says, so long as he proves that he loves me.' Well, thou art right, dear little woman, I will take the liberty of following the example thou hast set by using the second person singular. I tell thee I love thee. I repeat it. Dost thou believe it ? If not, so much the worse for thee. It is the avowal of my love which inspired me with happiness : the opinion thou hast of it takes only second place. (1) The love which one feels (2) that which one inspires. These are the true gradations of the soul. What shall I say to thee ? My heart is full of my last thought. It will want more than half an hour of silence and repose to regain the calm which

the pretty fire set up in it by writing to thee has caused me to lose. But, far from complaining, I would not for anything have it otherwise.

"Good heavens ! I want to turn over, but I have no more paper. It seems to me I have not been writing five minutes. . . . Marchand !* in future I must have foolscap paper for my Paris mail ! "

In a love letter it is possible to prove too much. "Everything's got a moral," as the Duchess remarked in *Alice in Wonderland,* "if only you can find it." Pauline would perhaps have had little to fear, if she could have kept him at pen's length : on paper, he was too much preoccupied in disentangling the intricacies of his own thoughts to be very dangerous ; but, at close quarters, her letters show that he was less inoffensive. The truth is that, apart from those of his own family, Beaumarchais does not shine in his relations with women. They had spoilt him by their adulation, and such men, at heart, are apt to hold a very poor opinion of those who exalt them. He is much more attractive when he can forget that he is a ladies' man, and reveals his light-hearted, unsophisticated and better self. In this mood he is a man of the greatest charm :

"Good morning, Aunt ; I embrace you, my sweet Pauline ; your obedient servant, my charming Perette. Children, love one another : that is the teaching of the apostle, word for word. If one among you wishes her sister evil, may it recoil on her own head : that is the prophet's curse. This part of my discourse is not intended for gentle, sensitive souls like you, I know, and I do not think, without extreme satisfaction, that nature in making you all so lovable, has given you that nice proportion of sensibility, equity, and moderation which enables you to find your happiness in living together, and me to find mine in the enjoyment of such a delightful society. One will love me (I sometimes tell myself) as her son, another as her brother, another as her friend, and my Pauline uniting all these sentiments in her dear little heart will inundate me under a deluge of affection, to which I shall respond according

* His valet.

to the capacity that the good gods have seen fit to bestow on your zealous servant, your sincere friend, your future . . . Plague on it! What a solemn word I was about to pronounce. It would have exceeded the bounds of the deep respect with which I have the honour of being, Mademoiselle, etc."

The prolonged engagement was not without its perils for the inexperienced girl. Her aunt was a comfortable, unobservant, indulgent creature, whose temperament quite unfitted her for the part she was called upon to fill. No obstacles were placed in the way of the lovers' interviews: on the contrary; and there were moments when Pauline had to remind her suitor of the respect due to his future wife—a duty of which she acquitted herself with great tact and spirit. But the repetition of such annoyances becomes enervating, for a girl in her situation has her most dangerous enemy within the gates. That she was often disquieted by his want of becoming humility is undeniable. How far her defences held against his encroachments we shall soon be able to judge:

"I am replying to you, my dear," she wrote, "from this abode of peace, but with my heart and soul in an agitation which I cannot control. What a fascinating letter is yours; how sweet and yet how dangerous! Thou would'st give me the illusion of happiness without diminishing my calm; dost thou think it possible?—how unreasonable you men are! Have I more virtue, more strength than thou, who knowest not how to keep thyself within bounds? At all events, I have no desire to seek opportunities; why create them? I am happy in thy love; I do not want any other good thing until I am entitled to it. Why excite me uselessly? Would'st thou wantonly give me pain? I do not ask for any sacrifices: we must wait. I quite understand thy reasons for this necessity, and I comply with them. Give me this proof of thy love and care for my repose, and I shall cherish thee for it more dearly than ever. Can I leave thy arms without being deeply moved, without suffering bitter grief? Ought'st thou not to spare me, since thou knowest we must have patience? . . . When I have received such proofs of thy affection I become

irritable, my gentleness becomes embittered, everything displeases me; I wait impatiently; I forget the reasons for a delay which gives me pain; I feel no longer the handsomeness of thy behaviour; I feel under less obligation to thee for thy integrity in the conduct of my affairs; I become unjust, sullen, ashamed; my character deteriorates. Thou art no longer in my eyes the god whom I adore; I look upon thee only as a despoiler trying to possess himself of something to which he has no right—a Decan, the manager of my estate who steals my goods."

"In short, I will not have a violent love which torments me in this way. I do not know how agreeable an impression this might make upon me; but so far I have seen it only overshadowed by a thousand sufferings; if, in the course of time, I come to see only its bright side, I shall surely owe it to my present economy: it is a capital which I invest that I may enjoy the interest. Let us not touch it. Must we not live for more than a day? I am told that my sweetheart is a good paymaster; that he is exact. I ask nothing better. Adieu, love! Adieu, my dearest! Adieu, my all! It will be a day of sunshine to me, a beautiful day, when thou returnest. Adieu!"*

Rightly speaking, there can be no virtue without temptation, or, at least there is no particular merit in virtue until it has proved itself superior to temptation. None need despair of a girl who could, when necessary, defend herself with so much wit, vigour, and good sense.

If lack of reticence in love-making was one of Pauline's grievances against Beaumarchais, another was the ambiguity of his attentions to other women. He even laid himself open to suspicion of carrying on an intrigue under her very eyes with Perette, the companion who lived with her. There was a violent storm which broke—as storms of this kind usually do—over the head of the woman, who was forthwith turned out of the house. Her rival once out of sight, Pauline restored her erring lover to favour. But however willing a woman may be to forgive such an injury to her self-esteem, she can never forget it—the corrosive memory of it will not fail to revive and lend rancour and suspicion to the next disagreement between the lovers. Nor was Perette the only woman to give her

* See *Revue des deux Mondes*, Oct.-Dec., 1852, p. 487.

cause for jealousy. The blithe pen of Julie Caron on more than one occasion throws light on this subject :

" Our house," she writes to a friend, " is a perfect Bedlam of lovers—sweethearts who live on love and hope ; but I can laugh at it all more easily than the others, because I am less in love ; yet I can conceive that to the philosophical eye it is a useful and interesting picture. Beaumarchais is a regular scamp whose levity plays havoc with Pauline and worries her to death. Boisgarnier and Miron hold long-winded sentimental discussions and excite themselves in an orderly way almost to the point of a beautiful disorder. The Chevalier and I are worse still. He is fond as an angel, lively as an archangel, ardent as a seraph ; whilst I am as gay as a lark, as beautiful as Cupid, and as mischievous as a demon. Love does not make me in the least lackadaisical like the others, and, yet, such is my folly, I cannot help tasting—that's the devil of it ! "

The Chevalier de S——, referred to by Julie, was born in San Domingo, and held an appointment under the Crown. Beaumarchais had recently made his acquaintance and introduced him into his family circle, perhaps with an eye to Julie's future. At any rate, he was pleased to find his new friend, before long, paying assiduous court to his favourite sister.

Such was the situation when Beaumarchais was called to Madrid. During his absence, Pauline wrote him most affectionate letters, in which she sometimes upbraided him as a negligent correspondent.

" Oh, when art thou coming back ! If thou didst but know how hateful this wretched separation is to me ! "

From time to time, Julie also took her " Pierrot " to task for his inattention to Pauline.

" For God's sake say something to the child ! "—she quaintly admonishes him.

By the time Beaumarchais returned to Paris, he had received very bad news from the West Indies. His worst fears were realized. His uncle Pichon just had time to take stock of the property, and report that Pauline's house and estate had been allowed to fall into almost irreparable ruin, so that the liabilities exceeded the assets, when he died. It looked as though Beaumarchais would lose all

his money. On making further inquiries, however, he was assured that by allowing the creditors to offer the estate for sale and secretly buying it in, the property was still capable, under good management, of yielding a respectable income.

But at this moment, Pauline, at the end of her patience, quarrelled with him, ostensibly over another of his escapades which had got to her ears. Taken aback by the suddenness of her attack, he was for a time at a loss how to meet it. In her passionate outburst, she may have said something which made him think her jealousy was only an excuse, and that for some other reason she had determined to break with him. His shrewdness was not at fault. He soon had ground to believe that the Chevalier had transferred his affection from Julie to his beautiful compatriot. Very much hurt, Beaumarchais immediately taxed him with unfaithfulness to Julie, which was bad enough ; but words failed him to express his indignation that the Chevalier should attempt to persuade Pauline (after all he had done for her) to leave him also in the lurch. He would never have believed such turpitude possible !

The Chevalier thought it prudent to defend himself. He told Beaumarchais that he, who had suffered so much from calumny, ought, of all people, to know better than listen to such idle tales. He wrote, not to ask forgiveness, but because he owed it to himself and to Mlle. Le B—— that the truth should be known on a point which compromised her, and also because "it would be painful, very painful, to me to lose your esteem."

So far so good. Beaumarchais went farther and fared worse. He wrote to Pauline for an explanation. This is her reply :

"Since before receiving your letter, I was unaware of the proposal of M. le Chevalier, and do not understand anything about the matter, you will perhaps allow me to make inquiries before giving you my answer——"

Beaumarchais next wrote to his friend, Pauline's cousin, accusing him also of making trouble, and concluded by saying that he no longer desired to marry her, but this he wished to be kept secret. The cousin replied that when his correspondent was in a state to listen to reason he would be ashamed of having called his good faith into question,

and proceeded warmly to defend both Pauline and the Chevalier. His letter is dated the 8th November, 1765, and is followed by a gap in the correspondence until the final rupture in February, 1766. By this time the Chevalier appears to have definitely supplanted Beaumarchais in the affection of the young Creole. The glamour of her highly emotional friendship for Julie had naturally disappeared, to give place outwardly to a relationship of the strictest formality, and secretly to a spiteful and vexatious rivalry.

After reading the foregoing letters no one will deny that Pauline may have had some justification for her conduct towards Beaumarchais; but she really had behaved badly to Julie. Yet, like a true daughter of Eve, she probably felt far more compunction for her treatment of Pierre Augustin, who rather deserved it, than for his sister who did not. The truth is that most women are capable of perfect loyalty to a man, but find it less easy to be equally loyal to a woman; among men, on the other hand, such loyalty is less common towards women than towards each other.

In his mortification, Beaumarchais made a last effort to win Pauline back to him. But that this thing should have happened to him, of all men, upset his self-confidence to such an extent that, whilst trying to be conciliatory, his irritation frequently got the better of his civility and even his knowledge of the world.

"So you have renounced me," he wrote to her, "and what time have you chosen to do it?—that which I had indicated to your friends and mine as the date of our union. I have seen treachery taking advantage of weakness to turn even my offers of service against me. I have seen you, who have so often grieved over the injustices I have suffered, join with my enemies to accuse me of wrongs which never even entered my head. If I did not mean to marry you, should I have put so little formality into the services I have rendered you? . . . Everything I have done has been turned against me. The conduct of a double-faced and perfidious friend, whilst giving me a cruel lesson, has taught me that no woman is so honest or so tender that she cannot be won over. The contempt

of all who know what he has done is his just reward. But to return to you. It is not without regret that I have thought of you, After the first heat of my resentment had passed, and when I insisted on your formally rejecting my offer of marriage in writing, there was mingled with my vexation a vague curiosity as to whether you would really take this final step. Now, without further delay, my position must be cleared once for all. I have received a very advantageous offer of marriage. On the point of accepting, I felt myself restrained by some honourable scruple : some thought of the past made me hesitate. I ought to have felt myself quite free, after what has passed between us ; yet I was not easy ; your letters did not tell me sufficiently clearly what I ought to know. I beg you to answer me exactly. Have you so entirely renounced me that I am free to enter into an engagement with another woman ? Ask this of your heart. If you have totally severed the knot which united us, do not hesitate to let me know at once. In order to spare you embarrassment in answering my question, I would add, in writing, that I have restored our relationship to what it was before these storms arose. My request would be improper if I did not give you entire liberty of choice. Let your heart alone reply. If you do not wish to give me back my liberty, tell me that you are for ever the same sweet and loving Pauline that I once knew ; that you believe you will be happy in belonging to me, and I will immediately break with everybody but you. The only request I have to make is that for three days the most absolute secrecy be preserved ; leave the rest to me. In this case, keep this letter, the reply to which will be brought to me. If your heart already belongs to another and you feel an invincible estrangement from me, at least give me credit for my honourable overtures. Give the bearer your decision which liberates me, then I shall sincerely believe I have fulfilled all my duties, and shall be content. Adieu. . . ."

Before Pauline could respond Beaumarchais withdrew this letter, and the same day returned it to her with the following enclosure :

" I asked you for a written answer. You sent after my sister to ask her for the letter to which you promised to

reply. She thought fit to withdraw and return it to me. I send it back to you, and beg you to read it attentively and to decide formally. I particularly desire that no one should come between you and me in order that I may be assured of the sincerity of your declarations. I return the parcel of your letters. If you keep them, kindly enclose mine with your answer. Reading your letters has moved me ; I do not wish to renew that pain ; but before replying consider well what is to your best advantage, both as regards fortune and happiness. My intention is that, forgetting the past, we should pass our days happily and peacefully together. Do not let the fear of having to live with members of my family, who do not please you, interfere with your love for me, if another passion has not extinguished it. My domestic affairs are so arranged, that, whether it be you or another, my wife shall be the happy and undisputed mistress of my home. Your uncle laughed at me when I reproached him with being opposed to me. He told me that, in his opinion, I had no reason to fear being rejected unless his niece had gone crazy. It is true that, at the moment of renouncing you for ever, I felt an emotion which told me I loved you more than I could have believed. What I ask you, therefore, is in absolute good faith. Do not ever deceive yourself by giving me the sorrow of seeing you the wife of a certain man. He would never dare to hold up his head in public again if he should contemplate carrying out this double treachery. Pardon me if I become heated. The very thought of it makes my blood boil. But, whatever your decision may be, I cannot wait any longer. I have laid aside all my business in order once more to give myself up to you.

"Your uncle has pointed out to me how little this marriage would be to my advantage, but I am far from allowing such considerations to deter me. I want to be indebted for you to no one but yourself, or all is over for ever. I rely on your treating this matter as strictly confidential, except for your aunt. You will understand that you would grievously offend me if it should get to my ears that you have abused my confidence. Not a soul knows that I have written to you. I confess that it would be delightful to me if, whilst all my enemies slept, peace were

concluded between us. Read your letters over again, and you will understand whether I have found again in my heart the love to which they gave birth."

If in her former letter Pauline had failed to make her meaning clear to her deserted lover, no such objection could be made to her reply :

"I can only repeat, sir, what I told your sister, that my mind is made up irrevocably : so I thank you for your offer, and desire with all my heart that you will marry somebody who will make you happy. I shall hear of it with great pleasure, as I shall of every good fortune which happens to you ; I assured your sister as much.

"My aunt and I must tell you how vexed we are at your disrespectful treatment, on our account, of a man whom we regard as our friend. I know better than anybody how wrong it is of you to say he is treacherous. I told your sister only this morning that a young lady who used to live with my aunt was the cause of all that has happened to-day, and that since then, it was only the fear of publicity which held me back. You have still several letters of mine, among them two written at that time, another written from Fontainebleau, and a few others which I shall be glad if you will be good enough to return to me.

"As I have already told you, I will ask one of our San Domingo friends to call upon you, to conclude everything which is outstanding between us.

"I am, Sir,

"Your very humble and most obedient servant,

"Le B. . . ."

Pauline may not be quite candid, but at least she is perfectly clear. She no longer loved him, and she gave as the reason of her change of heart an alleged infidelity which was supposed to have been forgiven and forgotten months before.

Pauline's cousin now wrote to Beaumarchais, regretting the rupture and offering the time-honoured consolations appropriate to the kind of misfortune which had befallen

him. As the worthy man says, with more truth than originality: "Man proposes but God disposes." He concluded by requesting his friend, in the name of the ladies, to hand over to him all the papers relative to the affairs of Mlle. Le B. . . . The letter is dated February 11th, 1766.

A few months later Beaumarchais had the humiliation of seeing the Chevalier de S . . . lead Pauline to the altar.

The poetry of the deserted lover at once gave place to the prose of the anxious creditor. He drew up and submitted a detailed and businesslike statement of the money owing to him by Pauline and her aunt, and in reply, the Chevalier, being on his honeymoon, deputed his brother, a pettifogging and peppery Abbé, to call upon Beaumarchais and thresh the matter out with him. The Abbé de S . . . conducted the negotiations with great vivacity and little consideration, wrangling over every item of the memorandum. After several stormy interviews and the interchange of many caustic letters, Beaumarchais wrote as follows:

"MONSIEUR L'ABBÉ,—I beg you to note that I have never failed in civility towards you personally, and that I owe nothing but contempt to him whom you represent, as I have had the honour of telling you twenty times over, and as I should very much like to tell him to his face, if he had been as prompt in showing himself as he was in stepping into my shoes. The proof that Mlle. Le B—— had need of me, of my affection, my counsels, my money, is that if it had not been for your brother, who disturbed the union of six years' standing, she would still be making use of my faculties, which I have lavished upon her so long as they were agreeable and useful to her. It is true that she has bought my services very dearly, since she owes to our affection for your brother the happiness of having married him, which she would never have done had he remained in the place where he was vegetating when I found and introduced him into my family. I do not understand the hidden meaning of the phrase in the *apology*, so it would be useless to attempt to reply to it. . . .

"I shall not discontinue to meet calumny and injustice

by doing all the good I can. I have always liked to do good, though expecting nothing but evil in return, so your advice adds nothing to my disposition in this respect.

"As you admit deviating from what is becoming to your character in your dealings with me, I have no wish to reproach you for it. It is enough that you yourself confess it for me to bear no ill will.

"I do not know why you have underlined the words *your sister*, when reminding me that I said it was thus that I loved Mlle. Le B——. Does this irony fall on her, on me, or on your brother ? However, that is just as you please. Although the fate of Mlle. Le B—— has no longer anything to do with me, I have no desire to speak of her in other terms than those I have used. It is not of her that I complain. She is, as you say, 'young and inexperienced,' and although she has very little fortune, your brother has made good use of his experience in marrying her, and has done very well for himself.

"Consider one other point, M. l'Abbé. Whatever I have said of him is meant in no way to reflect on you. It would be too humiliating for a man of your profession to be suspected of having had anything to do with your brother's behaviour towards me. Let him bear the blame himself, and do not attempt to excuse things unworthy of an apologist as upright as yourself."

In the end Beaumarchais considerably reduced his claim, and Pauline accepted the revised memorandum. A year after the marriage her husband died, and no attempt had been made to pay off the debt.

Speaking of Beaumarchais in a letter to her cousin, written in 1769, she says : "He need not worry himself ; he shall be paid." And there the matter ended. Beaumarchais pressed her no further, and a love affair which was to have been eternal ended in an exceedingly businesslike statement of account, amounting to 24,441 livres, 4 sous, 4 deniers, which was never settled.*

* From letters quoted by Loménie, v. 1., p. 166 *et seq.*

CHAPTER VIII

BEAUMARCHAIS IN HIS EARLY PLAYS

IN all that he did, Beaumarchais was one of those innovating men whom less enterprising people regard with fear and bewilderment. When, at thirty-five, he turned his attention to the theatre, it was to support and develop the daring theories recently enunciated by Diderot and illustrated by his turgid and indigestible drama *Le Père de Famille*, which, however, marked a revolution in writings for the stage. Beaumarchais practised the theory with more precision and clearness than the master himself, adding many features of his own, and, in some respects, carrying it much farther than Diderot would have been prepared to go. "Ah, my dear Beaumarchais!" exclaimed the great journalist on reading the play, "into what a hornet's nest have you thrust your head!" This result was inevitable, for they were the first masters deliberately to use the theatre as an instrument for propaganda.

In introducing his new play, Beaumarchais was one of the first to use the word *drama* for a dramatic composition. Anticipating Mr. Bernard Shaw (whose genius resembles his in more than one particular), Beaumarchais prefaced his play by a reasoned discourse on his views of dramatic art, which is not less interesting than the piece itself.

"The drama," he wrote, "holds an intermediate position between the heroic tragedy and the amusing comedy. It should be written in prose, and must confine itself to painting situations drawn from everyday life. The dialogue must be as simple and natural as it is possible to make it. Its true eloquence is that of situations, and the only colour permitted is the animated, vigorous, direct, undisciplined and authentic language of the passions."

Beaumarchais thought very little of the heroic manner. Like Huckleberry Finn, " he took no stock in dead people." He even uses the word *classical* in an ironical sense and as a synonym for barbarous. He will not admit that heroes and kings have any right to figure in the serious drama. " They excite no real interest in us," he said, " their fortunes, being exceptional, do not touch our hearts. It is only our vanity which is tickled by being initiated into the secrets of a magnificent court : what really interests the spectator is a misfortune which might happen to him ; that is to say, a merchant filing his petition in bankruptcy is more dramatic than a fallen king, or a warrior who has just lost a battle. . . ."

" What," he exclaimed, " are the revolutions of Athens and Rome to me, the peaceful subject of a monarchical state in the eighteenth century ? Why does the narrative of the earthquake which engulfed Lima and its inhabitants, three thousand leagues away, move me profoundly, whilst the judicial murder of Charles I. in England only makes me angry ? It is because the volcano which burst into eruption in Peru might shake Paris and bury me under the ruins, and perhaps threatens me at this very moment ; whilst we need never fear anything quite like the unheard-of misfortune of the King of England." The only thing which this proves, is that in 1767 Beaumarchais was no prophet.

In writing his play he spared no effort to be true to nature. " If I am blamed for having written this drama too simply, I confess that I have no excuse to offer. Again and again I have substituted an artless phrase for a more laboured one in the first draft. But how difficult it is to be simple ! "

Eugénie, like all the plays of Beaumarchais, is distinguished by a thinly-veiled attack on class privileges, and various abuses of his time. The plot turns on a mock marriage, in which the heroine's brother comes to avenge his sister's betrayal, or compel her false lover to marry her, and was obviously suggested by the author's adventure with Clavijo. The scene is laid in London, being changed from Paris, almost at the last moment, partly on the suggestion of the Duc de Nivernais, and partly in anticipation of difficulties with the censor.

As a play it is not as convincing as it might be, and

is as melodramatic a piece as ever faced the footlights. Nevertheless, in spite of its faults, it is not without merit. The improbability of the plot being admitted, it is developed with considerable ingenuity, and moves easily and rapidly to its climax. The first three acts, especially, show that Beaumarchais already possessed a certain mastery in dialogue and theatrical presentation. The characters are well accentuated, and the heroine, drawn with some emotional power, has an engaging charm and quiet dignity worthy of a less equivocal setting.

A novelty introduced to give realism to his play was to dispense with a drop-scene at the end of each act, and to fill in the intervals by the coming and going of servants preparing meals, lighting the candles, or re-arranging the furniture, and so on.

The author's stage directions are set down with great particularity, the position of each actor being clearly indicated in every scene, and his costume described to the smallest detail.

His next care was to do all in his power to ensure a favourable reception for the play. He was an early master of the art of self-advertisement, and he believed in leaving nothing to chance. To the general public he was known only as a prosperous financier and a man of pleasure who had made some way at court. His less fortunate fellow-dramatists bitterly resented his intrusion, and were not above plotting the downfall of the drama.

"It is unprecedented," wrote Collé in his *Journal*, "that the public should so generally vent its fury on an author. I speak only of his person, not of his piece." The new writer discovered, in fact, that a work of art, like a human being, is conceived in joy, moulded silently amid fears and anxieties, pains and discomforts, brought forth with difficulty, and often with grave danger, and frequently lives just long enough to involve its fond parent in endless perplexities and annoyances.

Beaumarchais countered the intrigues of his envious rivals by endeavouring to secure the benevolent interest of his aristocratic friends. To this end he wrote to Mesdames, the Duc d'Orléans, the Duc de Noailles, and his daughter, the Comtesse de Tessé, each letter adroitly turned to suit the person to whom it was addressed.

Lastly, he submitted his first draft to the Duc de Nivernais, a member of the Academy, and a man of considerable importance in the literary world, begging him to give it the benefit of his criticism.

After retaining the MS. for two days, the Duc returned it with several pages of urbane and extremely judicious comments, most of which Beaumarchais promptly turned to account. The Duc vigorously protested against the improbability of the plot and suggested many emendations. But as these would have meant recasting the whole play, Beaumarchais tried to meet his objections by transferring the scenes from France to England. The noble critic also confessed to finding the false lover entirely unconvincing. He could not conceive how such an utter scoundrel, without conscience and without remorse, after deceiving his victim to the last, should yet find grace in her eyes even when she had discovered his crime. He was no believer in eleventh hour conversions. Although Beaumarchais, in accordance with the Duc's strictures, greatly modified this character, the baseness of the lover remains the weak point of the play.

Apart from structural criticisms, the Duc offered many suggestions on the writer's style. In the original MS., for instance, when the irascible Baron learns the truth as to Eugénie's betrayal, his sister, in rebuking him for his anger, is made to say: "Courage, wild man (*homme des bois*), do not spare thy daughter. Be quick! Take a knife and plunge it into her heart!"

"What if we take away this knife?" suavely asked the Duc. "If I were you, I would also cut out the wild man, who is a kind of monkey hardly suitable for use as a form of address."

Beaumarchais wisely accepted both emendations and recast the whole scene, greatly to its advantage.

The first performance of *Eugénie* took place on the 29th January, 1767, not on the 25th June, as stated in most editions of the author's works. The piece had a very cold reception. But all is for the best to those who know how to profit by everything that befalls them. Neither as a man nor as a writer was Beaumarchais to be beaten at the first skirmish. He carefully noted the

remarks of the audience and profited by the hints they let fall, sought the advice of the players and of his friend, Poisinet, and abridged and re-wrote large portions of the play, especially in the "two last acts which had changed the success of the first three into a rout."

His alterations were to such good purpose that, two days later, on its second representation, the audience ceased to hiss; they wept, or "snivelled," as Collé unkindly observed. "It is all the fault of the women!" cried the rival dramatist indignantly. "They can talk of nothing but *Eugénie!* They have infected our gilded youth with their own silly fancies!"

As some people have a natural gift for appreciation, so others have an aptitude for disparagement. Collé belonged to the latter and, on the whole, far less intelligent school, for like the Blackbird in *Chantecler*:

> ". . . . . son œil n'est jamais ébloui.
> Il a, devant la fleur, dont il voit trop la tige,
> Le regard qui restreint et le mot qui mitige."

Possibly he may have been smarting under his failure of the previous year to place his admirable comedy *La Partie de Chasse de Henri IV.*, which was destined eight years later to achieve a great and lasting success at the Théâtre Français.

Other critics, however, were far less severe. Voltaire, in a letter to d'Argental, says: "I shall read *Eugénie* with great interest, to see how it is possible for such a hasty man to make everybody weep."

"*Eugénie*, played for the first time on the 29th January of this year," wrote Fréron in his *Année Littéraire*, "was rather badly received by the public and, indeed, looked like an utter failure; but after numerous curtailments and corrections, it has since achieved a brilliant revival and has for a long time held the public. This success does our players great credit."

Speaking of the author, the June number of the *Mercure de France* observed: "He is one of those happy beings, born under a lucky star, whom we sometimes meet in this world, on whom criticism has occasionally to exercise itself with severity, but who possess the secret of always charming us back to them."

The distinguished acting of Mlle. Doligny in the title rôle largely contributed to the ultimate success of the piece which had made such an inauspicious beginning.

Beaumarchais had presented his drama, entirely free of author's rights, to the players of the Comédie Française. It had been performed seven times, when its run was interrupted by the sudden illness of Préville, the leading actor, and another seven times upon his return. This was considered not a bad record at that period.

On the 10th April, 1769, Garrick wrote advising Beaumarchais that he had adapted *Eugénie*, under the title of *The School for Rakes*, and played it with great applause at Drury Lane.

The drama was revived at the Comédie Française for the last time in August, 1863, but failed to hold the audience, and after four representations was withdrawn.

If his Spanish adventure suggested to Beaumarchais the plot of his first play, his relations with the beautiful Creole were largely responsible for all the best scenes in his second. Indeed, he went so far as to give his heroine the name of Pauline : his taste was always uncertain.

The new piece was called *The Two Friends*, and was described as " by a man who has none."

Just as the fantastic ideas of Diderot on pictorial art had exerted a baneful influence over the work of Greuze, so now his equally far-fetched notions on dramatic art for a time led astray the comic genius of Beaumarchais. Following the master's dictum that social conditions, rather than the interplay of character, should form the chief interest in writings for the theatre, Beaumarchais did his best to thrill a Comédie Française audience with a highly improbable story of the vicissitudes of the Lyons silk trade.

The two friends of the title live together in a country house in the centre of the silk farming industry, and one of them hearing that the other, unknown to himself, is threatened with bankruptcy, diverts the funds of the business of which he is the manager, and, until the end of the play, allows himself to be looked upon as a thief, in a hopeless attempt to postpone the inevitable revelation of the truth. All comes right in the end, but there is no

good reason why the situation should not have been cleared up at the close of the first act—except, of course, the author's determination to spread his drama over five acts.

It was in vain that Beaumarchais expended all his skill in portraying the charming love story of Pauline and young Mélac. Nothing could redeem, from the dramatic point of view, the essential dullness of the subject around which the author had unwisely chosen to write his play.

The Two Friends was staged for the first time on the 13th January, 1770, and after being played ten times to steadily dwindling audiences, was withdrawn never to make its appearance in Paris again. The public was clearly of Voltaire's opinion that "Every kind of play is good, except the dull kind." Its failure was greeted with much satisfaction by its author's enemies and rivals, but the critic who described him as "a sombre, peevish, dismal character, incapable of producing anything with any gaiety or liveliness in it," had mistaken his vocation.

At its first performance, a wag in the pit cried:

"This is a real bankruptcy! Bang go my twenty sous!"

A few days later, whilst the play was still running, Beaumarchais met Sophie Arnould, who was then singing in the unsuccessful opera *Zoroaster*.

"In a week's time," he said, "you will have no audience, or next to none."

"Your *Friends* will send us some!" she laughingly replied.

The final blow was given in an anonymous quatrain quoted by Grimm:

> "J'ai vu de Beaumarchais le drame ridicule,
> Et je vais en un mot vous dire ce que c'est:
> C'est un change où l'argent circule,
> Sans produire aucun intérêt."

CHAPTER IX

MME. LEVÊQUE AND THE SECOND MARRIAGE OF BEAUMARCHAIS

AMONG the most intimate friends of Julie Caron was Madame Buffault, a famous Parisian beauty and the wife of a retired silk merchant, now Receiver-General of Customs and Tolls of the City.

One day towards the end of the Pauline episode, this lady called on Julie, and inquired after her brother, whom she said she had not seen for a long time.

"I do not know whether he is in his study: I believe he is at work on a play."

"I want particularly to speak to him," said the visitor.

Beaumarchais was sent for, and soon made his appearance in neglected attire, unshaven, with ruffled hair and preoccupied look.

"Ah, my dear fellow, what are you so busy about, when an amiable woman, recently widowed, and already much sought after, might give you the preference? I am going to take her to-morrow to the lonely part of the Champs Elysées, known as the 'Widow's Drive.' Take your horse for a run and meet us as if by chance. You can accost me and you will be able to see how you suit each other."

The next day Beaumarchais ordered his finest horse to be saddled, and, followed by his mounted servant, rode to the appointed meeting-place. He noticed the carriage in which the two ladies were driving some time before joining them. At last Madame Buffault pointed out the superb rider to her companion, said that she knew him, and asked if she might introduce him. Beaumarchais soon found himself seated in the carriage with the ladies, whilst his servant was ordered to return home with the

mounts. His new acquaintance was Geneviève Madeleine Wattebled, widow of Antoine Angélique Levêque, Garde Général des Menus Plaisirs, who had died on the 21st December, 1767, leaving her a handsome fortune. The daughter of Philippe Wattebled, cabinet maker to the King, she was born on the 11th November, 1731, and was, therefore, three months older, not three years younger, than Beaumarchais, as the gallantry of his biographers has led them to assert. Mme. Levêque is reputed to have been a most attractive woman. The widow and the widower were so delighted with each other's society, that it was decided to spend the rest of the day together, Beaumarchais proposing that the ladies should dine with him at his house. Madame Buffault had little difficulty in persuading her friend to accept the invitation, for she was already fascinated by his brilliant talk and distinguished bearing, and was naturally curious to know something about his home. It was there, as we have seen, that Pierre Augustin was at his best. The sight of him in this elegant and well-appointed house, with his genial and courtly father and his brilliant sister, and the old family servants, completed her captivation.

Beaumarchais pressed his advantage with ardour and expedition, but Madame Levêque was a woman of the world; nor was she ignorant of her lover's reputation as a gay Lothario. Before consenting to marry him, she is said to have addressed him in these words:

"Monsieur de Beaumarchais, I am a widow. I am aware of how little importance most men attach to the vows they utter at the altar. I feel how difficult it is not to love you; I know how devoted you are to women; but you are a man of honour: promise me (and I will believe you) that you will never abandon me; that you will never leave me alone to become the prey of suspicion and jealousy."*

Beaumarchais promised, and, what is more, appears to have kept his word. They were married at the Church of Saint Eustache, on the 11th April, 1768. And on the 11th December following, their son was baptized at Saint Sulpice under the name of Augustin.

His wife's fortune enabled Beaumarchais once more to

* Gudin, pp. 50-53 and 65-69.

take up the thread of affairs, and within a few months of his marriage, in co-operation with Pâris Duverney, he purchased from the State a great part of the Forest of Chinon, and was soon busy with a large staff cutting and selling wood.

In a letter to his wife, dated the 15th July, 1769, from Rivarennes in Touraine, he writes :

" Thou askest me to write to thee often, my dearest ; and I do so with all my heart : it is a pleasant relaxation from my heavy work in the village. To conciliate the rivalries of the managers ; to listen to the grievances and claims of the clerks ; to check accounts for more than 100,000 crowns, in small amounts from 20 to 30 sols, owing to the irregularities of the head cashier, whom it is necessary to relieve of his post ; the various wharves to visit, to supervise and examine the work of 200 labourers felling trees in the forest ; to arrange for the sawing and transport of 284 acres of cut timber ; to construct new roads from the forest to the river and to repair the old ones ; to stack 150 or 250 tons of hay ; to provide oats for thirty cart horses ; to buy thirty more horses for six more wagons to transport our hull-timber before winter sets in ; to build wharves and locks on the river Indre, where the timber can be loaded in fifty boats waiting to carry it to Tours, Saumur, Angers and Nantes ; to sign agreements with six or seven farms to supply provisions for a household of thirty persons ; to draw up and adjust estimates of income and expenditure for two years : there, my dear wife, you have in brief the sum of my labours, of which a part is already accomplished and the rest in a fair way towards completion ! . . .

" As thou sayest, dearest, we do not sleep here so long as at Pantin, but this strenuous labour does not displease me : since reaching this retreat, inaccessible to vanity, I have met only simple, unmannered folk, such as I myself often desire to be. I live in my offices—a little farm, wedged between a poultry yard and a kitchen garden, encircled by a thick hedge. The walls of my room are white-washed, and the furniture consists of a wretched bed, in which I sleep like a top, four rush-bottomed chairs, an oak table, a great chimney-piece without facing or

shelf; but I see from my window, whilst writing to thee, all the meadows and warrens of the valley in which I am living, full of robust and tanned men, who cut and cart forage in wagons drawn by oxen; a multitude of women and girls, with rakes on their shoulders or in their hands, singing the songs of the countryside with clear voices as they work. Through the trees in the distance I see the winding course of the Indre and an ancient turreted castle belonging to my neighbour Madame de Roncée. All is crowned by the heads of tufted trees which reach out in perspective to the very summit of the hills which surround us and form a huge frame marking the horizon on every side. This picture is not without charm. Good coarse bread, a more than modest diet, and execrable wine form my repasts. Truly, if I dared wish thee the ill to lack everything in a forlorn land, I should much regret not having thee at my side. Adieu, my love! If you think my description may interest our good relatives and friends, thou art at liberty to read it to them one evening. Embrace them all for me into the bargain, and, good-night! I am going to bed . . . but without thee. That seems often very hard to me. . . . And my son, how is he? I laugh to myself when I think that I am working for him."

After three years of happy married life, Madame de Beaumarchais fell into a decline. Her husband at once called in two of the most famous doctors of the time—Tronchin and Lorry; but in spite of all their skill and his own unremitting care, she died on the 21st November, 1770, leaving him at thirty-eight, a widower for the second time.

His enemies soon revived the terrible rumours which had arisen on the sudden death of his first wife; but, as in that case, he was able to prove that his second wife's fortune consisted almost entirely of an annuity, so he had everything to lose by her death. When, two years later, her son Augustin followed his mother to the grave, the father's adversaries did not accuse him of poisoning his child also. Even they drew the line somewhere.

CHAPTER X

BEAUMARCHAIS AT LAW

THE intimate business and friendly relationship which for the past ten years had existed between Beaumarchais and Pâris Duverney, had recently resulted, as we have seen, in the purchase by the associates of the Forest of Chinon, and had necessitated the advancement of large sums of money on both sides. Yet the extent of their mutual engagements had never been formally delimited. In view of Duverney's great age and failing health, and the probability of unpleasantness on the part of his heir, Beaumarchais pressed upon him the desirability of drawing up a formal and detailed statement of their commitments to each other. The old man, who trusted his partner implicitly, for long failed to see the necessity of such a document; but at length yielding to the constant representations of his friend, signed a deed in duplicate by which Beaumarchais restored to him 160,000 francs worth of promissory notes, and consented to the cancelling of the agreement respecting the Forest of Chinon. On his side Duverney declared Beaumarchais free of financial obligation towards him, and further acknowledged a debt of 15,000 francs payable at any time agreeable to his partner, and, lastly, undertook to lend him the sum of 75,000 francs for eight years without interest. What particular services Beaumarchais had rendered for this last generous accommodation we do not know. This document, dated the 1st April, 1770, is on a folio sheet, in the handwriting of Beaumarchais throughout, bearing his signature on the right at the bottom of the third page, and that of Duverney with the date on the left.

The transaction was kept secret from the prospective heir, as he did not approve of the relations with Beau-

marchais, and kept the old man virtually a prisoner in his own house.

On the 17th July, 1770, before the two last clauses of the agreement could be carried out, Pâris Duverney died, at eighty-seven years of age, leaving his entire fortune of about a million and a half francs to his grand-nephew, the Comte de la Blache, who through his influence had recently been made Brigadier-General.

Unfortunately for Beaumarchais, the Comte could not bear him, and was known to have said in society : "I hate that man just as a lover loves his mistress." There were, doubtless, several reasons for this dislike, quite apart from a natural antipathy. When Beaumarchais had power he liked to use it, and success tended to make him arrogant with his rivals. Then, rightly or wrongly, he had acquired a rather doubtful financial reputation among a large circle of people, without anybody being able to point to any definitely dishonest transaction in his career, though, we take it, they might easily have found a good deal of indelicacy. The Count, therefore, viewed with jealousy and suspicion this man, who had so much to say in his uncle's affairs. Moreover, Beaumarchais was the intimate friend of Pâris de Meyzieu, a nephew of Duverney's, who, for some obscure reason, had been entirely overlooked by his uncle, although a nearer relative than La Blache, and in spite of the fact that the success of the foundation of the Military College was largely owing to his loyal help. La Blache knew that Beaumarchais had more than once protested against his uncle's injustice to this nephew.

When Beaumarchais heard of Duverney's death, he presented his statement of the transactions between them, and, in an extremely conciliatory letter addressed to La Blache, requested that the agreement might be carried out. In his curt and almost illiterate reply, the Count said that he failed to recognize his uncle's signature, and implied that the document was false. Beaumarchais at once challenged him to bring an action against him for forgery. Without daring to take this course, La Blache appealed to the courts for the annulment of the deed, and claimed that so far from his owing Beaumarchais 15,000 francs, the latter was actually a debtor to his uncle's

estate to the amount of 139,000 francs. Taking advantage of the defects of the law and his own high social position, he pleaded in such a way that unless his opponent won the case, he would in the opinion of the world stand convicted of forgery. As the Prince de Conti said : " Beaumarchais must either be paid (*payé*) or hanged (*pendu*) " ; to which Pierre Augustin characteristically replied : " With all my heart ; but if I win my case, ought not my adversary, as cordially, to pay a little in his person ? "

That precisely is the weak point in the Count's armour, and any sympathy we may have had with his not unnatural resentment against Beaumarchais is discounted by the disloyal and cowardly way in which he fought his action.

In October, 1771, after more than fifteen months of legal quibbling, and of course ruinous expenses, the courts pronounced in favour of Beaumarchais. On the 22nd February following, the case was dismissed, and on the 14th March an order was made to execute the deed.

The Count now appealed to the Grand Chamber against this sentence. His decision left Beaumarchais perfectly calm and confident, as, indeed, he had every reason to be, for even to the most prejudiced mind it must have appeared very improbable that (rich as he then was, both in his own right and in the fortune of his wealthy wife, who was still alive), he should be so foolish as to risk utter ruin and even his life itself, by forging a document in the hope of extracting 15,000 francs from Duverney's heir. Moreover, he was occupied with other things, and especially with the preparation of *The Barber of Seville*, which he had for some months past been writing by way of relaxation.

" I love the theatre," he declared at this time to Gudin, " to the verge of folly ; I again ardently took up the idea which had become almost extinguished, since I had several times abandoned it, of devoting myself entirely to the drama."*

The play, in its earlier form of a vaudeville, had already been performed privately at the house of his friend, Le Normand d'Étioles. The official permission to produce the comedy at the Théâtre Français was signed by M. de Sartine on the 13th February, 1773, and Beaumarchais at once threw himself enthusiastically into the rehearsals, with

* Gudin, p. 247.

a view to its presentation during the approaching carnival.

All was going well when, with dramatic suddenness, he became involved in a strange and tragi-comical adventure, which still further complicated his affairs, indefinitely delayed the production of his play, and helped not a little in the loss of his case which was still pending.

CHAPTER XI

BEAUMARCHAIS, THE MAD DUKE, AND THE DEMI-MONDAINE

IN June, 1770, Mlle. Ménard, a young and pretty singer, made her first appearance at the Comédie Italienne as an understudy to Mme. La Ruette. She greatly pleased the general public, especially in the part of Louise in Sedaine's *Déserteur*, and won the enthusiastic praise of many well-known authors, poets and musicians. Her singing and acting, however, were very unequal and the opinion of connoisseurs was a good deal divided as to her merits. Moreover, she failed to find the key to the good graces of the Lord Chamberlain, the Duc de Richelieu, who evidently thought "he knew better than the public themselves what would give them pleasure for their money,"* and he obstinately refused to allow her to be received into the state theatre on trial.

Mlle. Ménard was a fresh and piquante little actress, with a moderately good voice, which had been badly trained and was scarcely worthy of her natural acting and fine elocution. In appearance she was a fine girl rather than an elegant woman, and the beauty of her arms was greatly extolled by experts.

Even Grimm and La Harpe, who have both some rather unkind things to say of her person and ability, agree that she ought to have been received. It was said that she was once a flower-girl, but, being ambitious, she bought a copy of Réstaut's "Grammar" and set herself to study the French language and pronunciation, and after a hard struggle secured an engagement for a minor part in a Parisian theatre. During her first performances, she called

* See Grimm. *Correspondance littéraire*, Juin, 1770.

on every artist and writer of repute to ask his advice and flattered him by following it with zeal and docility.

At the period we have now reached in this narrative, the Duc de Chaulnes was the protector of her charms, and had just commissioned Greuze to paint her portrait, "so that," as Grimm says, "if we do not succeed in keeping her on the stage, we shall at least have an opportunity of seeing her at the next *Salon*"*

The protection of the Duc de Chaulnes having placed an insurmountable obstacle in the way of her being protected by the Duc de Richelieu, who was an egoist in love, Mlle. Ménard found herself compelled to renounce her career as an actress, so she set up a *salon* which was attended by Marmontel, Sedaine, Grétry, Rulhières, Chamfort, Suard, and many noblemen introduced by the Duc, who was proud of his conquest.

The Duc de Chaulnes was the last representative of the younger branch of the house of Luynes. He was thirty years old and was already famous for the eccentricity and violence of his character. He had a powerful but undisciplined mind, much wit but no judgment, pride without dignity. Eager in the pursuit of knowledge, he was yet more ardent in the pursuit of pleasure. Of prodigious bodily strength, his reason was frequently overclouded by fits of uncontrollable passion, during which he conducted himself "like a drunken savage, not to say a ferocious beast."† These outbursts had often got him into trouble with the authorities, and he had recently been banished from the kingdom for five years. He spent his exile in the study of chemistry, in which he had made several discoveries, and in a scientific expedition to Egypt, where he had lived among the Bedouin. He had brought back from his travels many natural history specimens, and an ape, whose existence he delighted to make a burden to him.

Such was the man into whose hands Mlle. Ménard had committed her life and happiness. His jealousy, unfaithfulness and brutality had already extinguished whatever affection she may have had for him, and fear alone prevented her from leaving him, when the Duc suddenly

* Grimm. *Correspondance littéraire*, Juin, 1770.

† See Gudin de la Brenellerie, *Compte rendu*, 11th February, 1773.

developed an intimate friendship with Beaumarchais, and straightway had the temerity to introduce him to his mistress.

Under the assiduous attentions of the newcomer, Mlle. Ménard soon began to draw comparisons—and the Duc to make deductions: his friendship gave place to furious jealousy.

In her terror, Mlle. begged Beaumarchais to discontinue his visits. But the Duc's conduct went from bad to worse, and at last, in her despair, she sought refuge in a convent.

After some weeks of absence, she returned to her house and invited Beaumarchais to come and see her again.

Before accepting her invitation, Beaumarchais thought it proper to write to her protector as follows:

"M. le Duc,

"Madame Ménard advises me that she has returned to her house and invites me, among her other friends, to visit her whenever I care to do so. I considered that the reason which caused her to fly had ceased. She gives me to understand that she is free, and I offer you both my sincere congratulations. So the force of circumstances has accomplished what my representations failed to do; you have ceased to torment her; I am delighted for both your sakes. I had almost said for the sake of all three of us, if I had not resolved to set myself aside entirely in everything concerning the interests of this unhappy woman. I know what pecuniary efforts you have made to get her again into your power and with what nobility she has crowned the disinterestedness of six years by returning to M. de Genlis the money you had borrowed from him to offer to her. What upright heart would not warm towards her for such conduct? As for me, whose offers of service she has constantly refused, I consider myself honoured, if not in the eyes of the world, at least in my own, that she should number me among the most devoted of her friends. Ah! M. le Duc, such generous hearts are not kept by threats, blows or money! Pardon me if I venture on such reflections: they are not unnecessary to the end I have in view in writing to you. In

speaking to you of Mme. Ménard, I forget my personal grievances, I forget that after having warned you in every way, after seeing myself embraced and made much of by you, both at your house and mine, on account of the sacrifices which my attachment to you alone led me to make;* that, after you had complained to me of her in the most injurious terms, you suddenly and without any occasion, changed your tone and conduct and told her things a hundred times worse about me. I also pass over in silence the horrible scene you made before her—disgusting between two men—in which you so far forgot yourself as to reproach me with being the son of a watchmaker—I, who honour my parents even before those who believe they have the right to outrage their own.† You must feel, M. le Duc, the advantage which our respective positions gave me at that moment over you; and, if it were not for the unmerited anger which has led you astray ever since, you would certainly give me credit for the moderation with which I rebutted the insults of him whom I have always honoured and loved with all my heart; but, if even my respect for you cannot make me go so far as to fear any man, it is that I happen to be built that way. Is that a reason for bearing a grudge against me? On the contrary, ought not my consideration for you in every respect to have in your eyes the full price which my firmness gives it? I said to myself: 'Some day he will be ashamed of the wrongs he has heaped upon me.' Do what you will, you have no more succeeded in having a really bad opinion of me than in inspiring your friend with it. In her own interest she asked me not to see her. As no man is dishonoured by obeying a woman, I have neither seen nor had any direct communication with her for two months; now once more she permits me to take my place among her friends. If, during this time, you have not recovered the advantages which your neglect and violence caused you to lose, you must see that the means you employed were not the right ones. Ah! believe me, M. le Duc, abandon a mistaken course which has already caused you so many vexations! I have never sought to diminish the tenderness which this generous woman

* Beaumarchais had lent him a considerable sum of money.

† A reference to the Duc's scandalous lawsuit against his parents.

has bestowed upon you : she would have despised me if I had attempted it. The only enemy you have had with her is yourself. The wrong which your late violence did you points out the way to replace yourself at the head of her true friends. . . . Instead of the hellish life that we led her, let us all join together to procure her a quiet and happy existence. Remember, all I have had the honour of saying to you on this subject, and because of it, restore your friendship to him whom you cannot deprive of your esteem.

"If this letter does not open your eyes, I shall at least feel that I have accomplished all my duties towards the friend whom I have not offended, whose outrages I have forgotten, and to whom I come for the last time, vowing that should this step prove useless, I shall bear myself towards you with the coldness, hardness and firmness becoming to a nobleman in whose character one has been very badly mistaken."

The Duc left this letter unanswered, and Beaumarchais renewed his visits to Mlle. Ménard. For some weeks nothing unusual happened, but on Thursday, 11th February, 1773, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Paul Philippe Gudin, the inseparable friend of Beaumarchais, called to pay his respects to Mlle. There were present in her room, a woman companion, the chambermaid, and Mlle. Ménard's little daughter by the Duc de Chaulnes. After gently reproaching the visitor for not having been to see her for so long, she invited him to take a chair at her bedside, and suddenly burst into tears, bitterly complaining of her sufferings through the Duc's brutality. At this moment he entered the room. Gudin rose, bowed, and gave up his chair.

"I am crying," she sobbed, "because I am unhappy, and I beg M. Gudin to ask M. de Beaumarchais to refute the ridiculous charges made against him."

"What is the use," retorted the Duc, "of a rascal like Beaumarchais attempting to justify himself ? "

"He is not a rascal," she flashed, "he is a man of honour."

The Duc trembled with rage.

"Ah ! " he cried, "you are in love with him and are

determined to humiliate me! I declare to you that I am going to fight him!" He looked like a madman and terrified all present. Mlle. Ménard sprang out of bed and, with Gudin's assistance, tried to detain him; but easily shaking them off, the Duc dashed downstairs and out of the house.

Leaving by another door, Gudin ran to warn Beaumarchais. As he reached the Rue Dauphine, he met him in his carriage. Gudin seized the reins and stopped the horses. Beaumarchais looked out of the window to see what had happened.

"The Duc is looking for you to kill you!" cried Gudin.

"Is that so?" coolly answered Beaumarchais. "Well, the only thing he is likely to kill is the flea he has in his ear!"

Thereupon, to the dismay of his friend, he drove off to carry out his duties as Lieut.-Général des Chasses aux Bailliages et Capitainerie de la Varenne du Louvre.

Gudin turned towards home. As he reached the steps of the Pont Neuf, he felt himself pulled violently backwards by his coat-tail, and fell heavily into the arms of the Duc de Chaulnes, who, in spite of his resistance, "carried him off like a bird of prey" and flung him into a hackney carriage which was waiting for him, shouting to the coachman to drive with all speed to the Rue de Condé.

"What right have you," cried the indignant Gudin, "who are always talking about liberty, to violate mine?"

"The right of the stronger! Either you will find Beaumarchais for me, or . . ."

"M. le Duc, I am unarmed. You surely do not intend to murder me!"

"No, I am going to kill only this fellow Beaumarchais, and when I have plunged my sword into his body and torn his heart out with my teeth, the Ménard woman can go to the devil in her own way."

"I do not know where M. de Beaumarchais is," replied Gudin, "and even if I did know, I certainly would not tell you in your present state of mind."

"If you dare to resist me, I will box your ears!" shouted his pleasant companion.

"I warn you, M. le Duc, that I shall return the blow."

"What, you will box my ears!" yelled the nobleman,

and flinging himself on the unfortunate Gudin, he tore his hair and snatched off his wig, which he brandished aloft, to the delight of the passers-by. He then seized him by the throat, and badly scratched his neck, ear and chin.

Gudin shouted for the guard. The Duc became calmer, and Gudin declared that if Beaumarchais was not at home, he would go immediately to the Commissary of Police and lodge a complaint against his persecutor. Knowing that Beaumarchais was absent, and thinking that his servants would be sure not to reveal his whereabouts when they saw the Duc's excited condition, Gudin slipped out of the carriage directly the Duc had left it to knock at his rival's door. Taking a roundabout way, in case of pursuit, he hurried home.

But Gudin had reckoned without the prestige of a peer of France, and the house servants had not dared to conceal from the Duc where their master was to be found.

The nobleman rushed off to the court where Beaumarchais, in gorgeous raiment, was sitting in judgment on minor offenders against the game laws. Ignoring the ushers and attendants, he pushed his way straight to his man and demanded that he should instantly come outside to him.

"I cannot do that," answered Beaumarchais, "the public service compels me to carry through my duties in a becoming manner," and he politely begged the Duc to take a seat until after the audience. But the nobleman insisted, and Beaumarchais, fearing lest those present should guess what was the matter, suspended the sitting for a few minutes, whilst he invited his adversary to join him in another room.

There, the Duc told him in the foulest language, that he was determined to kill him on the spot, to tear out his heart and drink his blood, for he was thirsty.

"Oh, if that's all, M. le Duc," replied the imperturbable Beaumarchais, "you must allow business to come before pleasure," and he moved towards the door to return to the court. The Duc stopped him and threatened to tear his eyes out before the whole assembly if he left the room without him.

"You would only ruin yourself, M. le Duc, if you should be so mad as to attempt it."

Beaumarchais calmly resumed his presidential chair and the audience continued for fully two hours, whilst the Duc strode noisily to and fro, muttering imprecations, and from time to time interrupting the proceedings to demand :

" How much longer are you going to be ? "

At last he drew his rival's deputy, the Comte de Marcouville, aside, and told him that he was waiting to fight Beaumarchais.

When the court rose, Beaumarchais went upstairs to change his clothes, and, rejoining the Duc, asked him what grievances he could have against a man whom he had not seen for six months.

" I want none of your explanations : either we fight instantly, or I will make a row before these people."

" I suppose you can wait till I get my sword," answered Beaumarchais, " I have only a mourning sword in my carriage : you surely will not insist on my defending myself against you with that."

" We are going to call on the Comte de La Tour du Pin ; he will lend you one, and I want him to serve as a witness."

With that, he sprang into his opponent's carriage, leaving him to scramble in after. On the way, the Duc threatened his companion with all the resources of a voluminous vocabulary, and, infuriated by the coolness of his replies, at last shook his fist in his face. Beaumarchais said that if he wanted him to fight he would have to curb his impatience until he had got his sword, for he had no intention of fighting, in the meantime, like a street rough.

When they reached the Comte's house, they met him just stepping into his carriage. He regretted that a pressing engagement made it impossible for him to undertake the service required of him, at least until four o'clock that afternoon, and he drove away.

The Duc then suggested that Beaumarchais should accompany him to his house and stay there until the appointed hour. Beaumarchais refused to trust himself in a house where his safety would depend on the loyalty of a man who had so little control over himself, and he ordered the coachman to drive them to his own home.

" If you get down," roared M. de Chaulnes, " I will stab you on your doorstep ! "

"Then you must have that pleasure, for I intend to go home and wait until I know exactly what you mean to do."

These words met with another flow of bad language from the nobleman.

"Come, come, M. le Duc, when a man really means to fight he does not talk so much. Do me the honour of dining with me, and if by four o'clock I do not succeed in restoring you to your senses and you still persist in forcing upon me the alternatives of fighting you or having my face scratched, the sword must decide between us."

When the carriage arrived at his house, Beaumarchais got out, followed by the Duc, and, having let himself in, summoned his servants and calmly ordered the dinner. His valet handed him a letter, but before he could open it, his guest snatched it out of his hand. Beaumarchais tried to pass the incident over as a joke, but this only set the Duc swearing again. Seeing that his father was alarmed, Beaumarchais ordered dinner for two to be served upstairs in his study, and led the way, followed by his footman. Before dismissing the servant, he told him to fetch his sword.

"It is being repaired at the maker's, sir," answered the man.

"Then go and see if it is ready: if not, bring me a new one."

"I forbid you to go out!" cried the Duc, "if you attempt it, I'll kill you."

"So you have changed your project? Thank God!" exclaimed Beaumarchais, "for I cannot fight without a sword," and he signed for the valet to leave them.

He then sat down to write. His guest snatched away his pen. He tried to talk him into a better frame of mind, but, without warning, the Duc seized the mourning sword which on entering the room Beaumarchais had laid on his desk, and, grinding his teeth like a madman, advanced to attack him with it, still carrying his own sword at his side.

"Ah, you coward!" cried Beaumarchais, and he caught his enemy in his arms to prevent his using the weapon, and gradually pushed him towards the bell. Seeing his intention, his assailant thrust the fingers of his free hand

into his eyes, and inflicted deep scratches in his face, covering it with blood; but Beaumarchais kept his hold and at last succeeded in ringing.

"Disarm this madman!" he cried to the servants who came running in answer to his summons. His cook, a huge fellow, made for the Duc with a heavy piece of wood.

"Stop!" shouted his master, "do not harm him, or he will accuse me of trying to murder him in my house."

They wrenched the sword from his hand, but he instantly seized Beaumarchais by the hair, tearing a handful from the front of his head. The pain caused him to lose his hold on his enemy, but he drove his fist with great force to his face.

"Wretch!" roared the nobleman, "how dare you strike a Duc and a peer of the realm!"

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, the incongruity of the exclamation tickled Pierre Augustin's sense of humour, and he had difficulty in restraining his laughter.

The Duc now caught him by the throat, and the combatants at length found themselves struggling at the head of the stairs, giving and returning blows with all their strength. The servants threw themselves in a body between their master and his assailant, but their interference caused them to overbalance, and all were precipitated in a tangled heap to the bottom of the staircase.

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Extricating himself, the Duc ran to open. He found Gudin on the threshold, and, seizing his arm, pulled him in, and setting his back to the door, declared that he would cut in pieces anybody who attempted to come in or go out. The noise he made so terrified the women that one of them rushed upstairs, and throwing open a window, shrieked that her master was being murdered. Gudin, alarmed at the sight of his friend with his coat and shirt torn to rags and his face streaming blood, tried to lead him upstairs; but the Duc would not allow it, and, drawing his sword which he still carried at his side (for none of the servants had dared take it from him because of his rank), made a savage lunge at Beaumarchais. The latter avoided the stroke, and the servants threw themselves

upon the infuriated nobleman and at length succeeded in disarming him ; but not before he had wounded the valet in the head, gashed the coachman's nose, and pierced the cook's hand.

" You miserable coward ! " cried Beaumarchais ; " that is the second time you have attacked an unarmed man with your sword ! "

The Duc now ran into the kitchen to look for a knife, but the servants had already locked up all the cutlery. Beaumarchais went into his study and armed himself with a pair of heavy fire-irons. On coming downstairs he found his assailant seated alone in the dining-room, devouring the food left on the table. He had swallowed a large plate of soup, several cutlets and two decanters of water.

Again there was a knock at the front door, and, running to open it, the Duc met the Commissary of Police Chenu. Beaumarchais explained the situation to the magistrate, but his opponent interrupted him to say that he had arranged to fight him in the presence of the Comte de La Tour du Pin at four o'clock, and that he found himself unable to wait for the appointed hour.

" What do you think of this man, sir," said Beaumarchais to Chenu, " who after making a terrible scene in my house, has the effrontery to divulge to a police officer his intention to violate the law, and compromises a general officer by naming him as a witness, thus at a stroke destroying all possibility of carrying out his project, which this cowardly admission proves that he had never seriously entertained ? "

At these words, the madman again rushed at Beaumarchais, who, upon the arrival of Chenu, had laid down his fire-irons. He defended himself as well as possible with his fists. The officer succeeded in separating the combatants, and asking Beaumarchais to stay in the reception room, led the Duc, who had set his mind on breaking the glass, into another apartment.

At this moment, the valet returned with a new sword, which he handed to Beaumarchais, who hastened to explain to the officer that he had no intention of fighting a duel, but that he would never go out unarmed in case his aggressor should take it into his head to insult him in public as

he had just done in his house, when he swore to deliver the world of him.

The Duc now tamely followed M. Chenu into the adjoining room, but at once began to tear his own hair and strike himself in the face with his clenched fists. At length the officer succeeded in calming him, and, after coolly ordering the valet, whom he had wounded, to dress his hair, he left the house and went home, whilst his victims went upstairs to dress their wounds.*

Beaumarchais terminates his version of this encounter, supplied to the police, with these words :

"In the course of this record I have scrupulously refrained from comment ; I have narrated the facts simply and, as far as possible, reproduced the exact words used, having no desire to deviate from the truth in any particular whilst relating the strangest and most revolting adventure that could well happen to a reasonable man."

The Commissary, in his report to M. de Sartine, obviously knows not what to make of the affair, but is extremely circumspect in his references to the Duc, having a lively sense of the power and influence of his family.

The deposition of Beaumarchais compares very favourably both from the point of view of frankness and probability with that of M. de Chaulnes.

After being for over three years, asserts the Duc, the dupe of the Sieur de Beaumarchais, who he thought to be his friend, he had strong reasons to keep him at a distance. He conceals the real cause of the quarrel, stating that the trouble arose through certain calumnies which Beaumarchais had spread concerning him. On the matter being reported to him, he went to his libeller's house, accompanied by the Sieur Gudin, but learned that he was attending a sitting of the Tribunal of the Capitainerie. He immediately proceeded to that court to demand an explanation. On the conclusion of the audience, he drove home to dinner with the Sieur de Beaumarchais, but had no sooner entered the house than his companion grossly insulted him, and he was compelled, as a man of honour, to ask him to come outside and give him satisfaction. Whereupon the Sieur de Beaumarchais struck him, and four of his servants fell

* Gudin, pp. 80-89.

upon him and took away his sword, whilst at the same time his assailant sent his sister to fetch the Commissary of Police. Even the arrival of the magistrate failed to prevent this misguided man from making the most impudent accusations against him. On leaving his house he went at once to give an account of the affair to M. de Sartine, and on the morrow, by his advice, to M. le Duc de la Vrillière. Returning from Versailles, he heard that M. de Beaumarchais was telling everybody that he had refused his challenge. As it was impossible for a man of birth like himself to cross swords with a person like the Sieur de Beaumarchais, who was the son of a watchmaker, he let it be known that he intended to punish him for his insolence in a manner appropriate to his humble rank. In conclusion, he boldly asserted that he had never come under the notice of the police, either in Paris or elsewhere, as a gambler or a quarrelsome or disorderly person, " whilst the reputation of M. de Beaumarchais is not by a long way so intact, since, apart from his notorious insolence and the most extraordinary rumours about him, he is at this moment undergoing a criminal prosecution for forgery."

M. de Chaulnes knew perfectly well that this concluding paragraph, and, indeed the greater part of his deposition, was little better than a tissue of lies, for even La Blache did not dare accuse Beaumarchais of forgery, nor was it a criminal court which was trying the case; but such was the damning effect of this lawsuit, and his enemies' calumnies upon his reputation, that the Duc could make these false charges with impunity, even before sentence was pronounced.

After the harrowing experiences of the day, we might well suppose that Beaumarchais would take to his bed for a few days by way of restoring his nerves. Not at all! His marvellous vitality, one of the secrets of his charm, enabled him to shed his troubles with childlike facility. The same evening, he had promised to visit one of his friends and read the " Barber of Seville " to a large company assembled at his house. At the appointed time, Beaumarchais arrived, fresh, well-groomed, cheerful and apparently without a care in the world, his bruises and scratches alone betraying the ordeal from which he

had just emerged. He read his comedy with great spirit, entertained the company with a most amusing narrative of his encounter with the Duc, and spent much of the night in singing Spanish songs to his own accompaniment on the harp.*

The next morning his father brought him a sword he himself had carried in his youth.

"You people of to-day have wretched weapons," he said; "but this is a sound one, belonging to a time when there was more fighting than nowadays. Take it, and if that scoundrel of a Duc comes near thee, kill him like a mad dog."

The adventure had made such a stir that the matter was taken up by the Tribunal of the Marshals of France, the judges in affairs of honour among gentlemen.

In the meantime, the Duc de la Vrillière had taken upon himself to order Beaumarchais to retire into the country for a time; but on his vigorous protests against this irregular sentence, which would gravely compromise his honour in relation to M. de Chaulnes, he was allowed to consider himself under arrest in his own house, until the affair had been reported to the King.

Both combatants were now summoned to appear before the Tribunal of the Marshals. Beaumarchais was able to prove that the only grievance the Duc de Chaulnes could possibly have against him was the favour bestowed upon him by a lady whose affection that nobleman had not been clever enough to retain. This was, doubtless, very annoying to the Duc; but such things will happen. The court decided against M. de Chaulnes, and on the 19th February he was arrested and imprisoned in the Château de Vincennes. The Tribunal having sent for Beaumarchais a second time, informed him that he was free.

Beaumarchais, however, knew the world in which he lived too well to feel quite easy. He, therefore, called upon the Duc de la Vrillière to obtain his assurance that he really could consider himself at liberty. This courtier being out, he went straight to M. de Sartine, and asked him the same question. The chief of police soon set his mind at rest by stating that he had entirely cleared himself.

* Gudin, p. 89.

Beaumarchais thereupon ventured out into the streets again.

But the Duc de la Vrillière, annoyed that the Tribunal had revoked in the King's name, orders which he had given by the same authority, thought of an ingenious way of rebuking the officiousness of these magistrates : he caused Beaumarchais to be arrested and conveyed to Fors l'Evêque.

CHAPTER XII

BEAUMARCHAIS IN PRISON

ALTHOUGH it was generally admitted that Beaumarchais was entirely blameless in this quarrel, which had cost him his liberty, few people among the general public bothered themselves about the injustice which had been meted out to him: such accidents were common enough in those days, and might have happened to anybody.

"This very insolent individual," says Bachaumont, in describing the affair, "who fears nothing, is not liked, and although nobody appears to have anything with which to reproach him in this brawl, less pity is felt for him than for another in the vexations he has met with."

But he was not wholly without sympathizers. During the first weeks of his imprisonment, he was greatly touched by receiving a thoughtful letter enclosing a purse from the six-years-old son of his friend M. Lenormand d'Étioles, by his second wife. The little boy was very fond of Beaumarchais, and was much distressed at hearing of his friend's misfortune.

"Sir," he says, writing from Neuilly on the 2nd March, "I am sending you my purse, because one is always unhappy in prison. I am very sorry that you are in prison. Every morning and every evening I say an *Ave Maria* for you. I have the honour of being, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant, CONSTANT."

Beaumarchais wrote thanking the mother for allowing his little friend to give him this mark of generosity and attachment, and congratulated her on having inculcated such thoughtfulness for others in a child so young. He begged her to reward little Constant in such a way that he should not conclude that every beneficent act receives its recompense, and ended by saying:

"This letter and purse have made me feel as joyful as a child. Happy parents to have a son capable, at six years of age, of such an action! I also had a son, but I have him no longer! And yours already gives you such pleasure! I share it with all my heart, and beg you to continue to love a little him whose misfortune gave rise to this charming thought on the part of our little Constant."

To the little boy himself he wrote:

"My dear little Constant,—I received with much gratitude your letter and the purse you enclosed with it. I have carefully shared out their contents among my fellow-prisoners, according to their several needs and my own, keeping for your friend Beaumarchais the better part—I mean the prayers, the *Ave Maria*, of which most assuredly I have great need, whilst distributing among poor people, who are suffering, all the money contained in your purse. Thus, in your desire to oblige a single man, you have won the gratitude of several; that is the usual result of all good actions such as yours.

"Good-bye, little friend Constant.

"Beaumarchais."

Writing to Gudin on the first day of his imprisonment, Beaumarchais describes his situation with some humour, but cannot tell his friend whether he owes the little attention that has been paid him to the de Chaulnes family, the Minister, or the Ducs and Peers as a body. What can he do? for "to be in the right a man invariably puts himself in the wrong in the eyes of the powerful, who are always quick to punish but never to judge."

Meanwhile Mlle. Ménard, alarmed at the Duc's fresh outburst, sought the protection of M. de Sartine, who did his best to calm her fears. In thanking him, the distressed lady said she had determined once more to seek refuge in a convent, although she was careful to make him understand that this was a temporary arrangement—she had no desire for him to exaggerate the extent of her vocation. She begged him to make her retreat inaccessible to the violent man from whose fury she had fled. She trusted him so implicitly that she had already used his authority to place

her daughter in the Convent of the Présentation. "Deign, sir," she continued, "to extend to the mother the protection which you have already exerted in favour of her daughter. After God, we put all our trust in you—a trust which is only equalled by the respectful sentiments with which I have the honour of being, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant. . . ."

On the following day M. de Sartine directed the Abbé Dugué, who had already befriended the hapless lady, to find a convent for her. The worthy priest was much perturbed at the delicate and distasteful mission which had been confided to him. Nevertheless, he acted with energy and expedition, and the same evening was able to report progress. First of all, he had tried to persuade the prioress of the Convent of the Présentation to take the mother as well as the daughter; but in spite of this lady's good will, the house was already full, and it was impossible for her to receive any more guests. He next went to the Cordelières in the Rue de l'Oursine, and after many questions, which he "was compelled to evade," his request was granted. At eleven o'clock that morning he had had the satisfaction of seeing Mlle. Ménard duly installed. He was extremely ill at ease in being innocently involved in this "catastrophe." He would be greatly reassured if M. de Sartine could, at least for the time being, make it impossible for the Duc and M. de Beaumarchais and their agents to come near this retreat; for, in view of the difficulties he had experienced in finding a place of refuge for the lady, he had been obliged to pass her off as his relative, and he really did not know what these nuns would say if, by the violence or imprudence of either of the interested parties, it should leak out that it was a kept woman whom he had been at such pains to introduce into their house; "whilst if only these rash rivals would leave her in peace, her sweet face and character would plead strongly in favour of this afflicted recluse, and spare me the disgrace of appearing to be not only a liar, but guilty of most irregular conduct. I left the ladies very well disposed towards their new boarder; but, I repeat, what a disgrace it would be for her and for me, who have put myself so much forward in this affair, if jealousy or love,

equally out of place, should go so far as to exhale their scandalous transports or their unedifying (*mésédifiants*) sighs in her parlour."

But Mlle. Ménard's vocation for the religious life was of the slightest, and after a fortnight's retirement, finding that her persecutor was still safely under lock and key, she returned to her home as precipitately as she had left it.

In spite of the remonstrances of Beaumarchais, she could not be persuaded to go back to the convent, but immediately set herself energetically to procuring his release.

Profiting by the imprisonment of his opponent, La Blache worked unremittingly to blacken his character in the eyes of the judges. Beaumarchais wrote letter after letter to the Duc de la Vrillière, complaining bitterly of his unjust treatment. M. de Sartine, who was a man of feeling, undertook to solicit for him permission to go out for a few hours each day to prepare his case, visit the judges, and to attend to other urgent business ; but the minister replied : " The man is far too insolent ; let him instruct his attorney to conduct his case."

But, as Beaumarchais pointed out to M. de Sartine, M. de la Vrillière knew as well as he did that the course he recommended was forbidden by law.

" Good heavens ! " he cried, " cannot they ruin an innocent man without making a laughing-stock of him ? Sir, I have been grievously insulted, and they deny me justice because my adversary is a nobleman. I have been put in prison and kept there because I have been insulted by a man of quality."

M. de Sartine agreed that all this was true, but, nevertheless, advised him to alter his tone, and bow to the inevitable by asking, not for justice, but for pardon.

At last Beaumarchais, very much against the grain, wrote a humble letter—almost as humble as that which M. de Chaulnes had already written on his own behalf—to the minister, flattering his petty vanity, and at once secured his permission to go out during the day, attended by a police officer, on condition that he returned to the prison for his meals and to sleep.

Beaumarchais spent his hours of liberty in attempting to counteract the machinations of his opponent. He

sought interviews with his judges, as was then the custom among litigants, and of which the Comte de la Blache had already taken full advantage. But do what he might, the Comte was too strong for him, and during his imprisonment had succeeded only too well in inspiring judges and public alike with his own malignity.

On the report of Counsellor Goëzman, the Parlement overruled the decision of the First Tribunal, setting aside the agreement between Beaumarchais and Pâris Duverney as invalid. Thus Beaumarchais was indirectly declared guilty of forgery, without any formal charge being made against him. This iniquitous judgment gravely compromised not only his honour but his fortune, for it condemned him to pay 56,300 francs, with five years' interest, and all the costs of the proceedings. Nor was this all, for the success of La Blache encouraged other claimants, including the sister and other relatives of his first wife, as we have already related in a former chapter. For a moment, even his courageous heart faltered under these blows.

On the 9th April we find him pouring out his troubles to the sympathetic M. de Sartine :

"I am at the end of my courage. . . . My credit is destroyed, my affairs are in ruin, my family, of whom I am the sole support, are in despair. Sir, I have all my life tried unostentatiously to do good, yet I have always been defamed by enemies. If you knew me in my family circle, you would recognize me as a good son, a good brother, a good husband, and a good citizen, earning only benedictions from those around me, whilst I am shamelessly calumniated by those who do not know me. Is there no limit to the vengeance exacted of me for this wretched de Chaulnes affair ? My imprisonment has cost me a good hundred thousand francs. In form and substance this wicked sentence makes me shudder, and whilst I am kept in this horrible prison I have no chance of retrieving my losses. I have strength to bear my own troubles, but none to bear the sight of my worthy father's tears—he who at seventy-five years of age is dying of grief at the abjection into which I have fallen. I have none against the pain of my sisters and nieces, whose future is already overshadowed by the fear of want arising out of the deplorable

state into which my detention has thrown me and my affairs. To-day all the activity of my mind turns against me; my situation is killing me; I am struggling against an acute illness brought about by sleeplessness and loss of appetite. The infected air of the prison is destroying my health."

On the 8th May, after two and a half months of unjustifiable imprisonment, La Vrillière at last restored him to liberty.

Suddenly there arose out of this lost action another and more terrible lawsuit, which, like an eighteenth-century Dreyfus case, convulsed the whole country, and almost cost Beaumarchais his life. By dint of an amazing combination of skill, daring and eloquence, Beaumarchais turned the threatened disaster into a triumph almost without precedent. This he accomplished by boldly appealing to public opinion over the head of the judges, the Court and the Sovereign himself, in a series of magnificent open letters, in which he cunningly associated his cause with that of the oppressed people, and incidentally attacking the corrupt and usurping Maupeou Parlement with the deadly weapons of irony and ridicule, succeeded in overthrowing it. He revealed himself as a great publicist, a master of comedy, and a forerunner of the Revolution. At one stroke he became the hero of the nation and the most talked of man in Europe.

"A year ago," says Grimm, "he was the most hated man in Paris: everybody on the word of his neighbour thought him capable of the greatest crimes; to-day everybody dotes upon him."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW "LOUIS XV. OVERTHREW THE OLD PARLEMENT AND FIFTEEN LOUIS THE NEW"

IN 1771 the Chancellor Maupeou, who had risen to power by the influence of Mme. Du Barry, still further ingratiated himself with the King by abolishing the Parlement de Paris, and exiling its members on account of their constant opposition to the royal wishes, setting in its place a council composed of men whom he could depend upon to further his views. In spite of many notorious abuses which were allowed to subsist under the old Parlement, and were adroitly abolished in the new, this violent measure excited great indignation throughout the country, and the new council was derisively named the Parlement Maupeou.*

Among its members was Louis Valentin Goëzman, a dissipated though learned Alsatian jurist, who in 1765 had established himself in Paris with his young and pretty second wife.† The pair were in continual financial embarrassment caused not less by the husband's pursuit of women than by the wife's pursuit of pleasure, and they were equally unscrupulous as to the means they employed to gratify their tastes; as Mme. Goëzman naïvely remarked in a moment of expansion: "It is impossible to live honestly on what we are paid, but we have the art of plucking the fowl without making it cry out."‡

These words were spoken in the presence of several people at the house of Lejay the bookseller, who sold her husband's books, and was probably one of her favoured

* *Recueil sur l'Édit de* 1770, I., p. 464.

† Huot (P.). *Goetzmann et sa famille* (1649–1794). *Revue d'Alsace*, pp. 7–11.

‡ Deposition of Lejay. *Archives nationales.*

admirers ; at any rate, she frequently obtained money from him, quite apart from her husband's royalties ; in fact, her rapacity was only exceeded by that of Mme. Lejay, the bookseller's wife, who, in her turn, was the most expensive of the long line of Mirabeau's mistresses.*

Goëzman having been appointed judge-advocate to report on his case, Beaumarchais had no sooner obtained permission to leave his prison, than he made several vain attempts to secure an interview in order to instruct the judge. Hearing of the ill-success attending these efforts, Lejay, who was a stranger to Beaumarchais, sent word to him by Bertrand Dairolles, a common friend, that the only way of gaining access to Goëzman, and of making sure of his equity, was to give a present to his wife, and suggested two hundred louis as an appropriate sum.

Despairing of his case unless he succeeded in interviewing the judge beforehand, and thinking, like Crispin, that "justice is such a precious thing that you cannot pay too much for it,"† Beaumarchais borrowed one hundred louis from his friends, and handed that sum, with a watch ornamented with diamonds of equal value, to the bookseller, requesting him to pass them on to the judge's wife. Mme. Goëzman accepted the present, but demanded a further sum of fifteen louis, which she said was intended for her husband's secretary. On receiving this amount, she told Lejay that if Beaumarchais lost his case, everything would be returned to him. The following day Beaumarchais, accompanied by his prison guard, was granted an interview with the judge. This was on Friday, the 3rd April. During the brief conversation, Goëzman showed, by his incongruous observations, that he had very little knowledge of the case. Beaumarchais told him this, and he replied that the case was a simple one, and he was quite competent to render an exact account to the court on the following Monday, when it was down for hearing. As he spoke, Beaumarchais thought he detected an equivocal smile on his face. He requested a further interview, but this was refused as unnecessary.

* Dumont (E.). *Souvenirs sur Mirabeau*, p. 86. Her influence on him was calamitous. Once, shocked by her cupidity, he said to her, in the presence of Dumont : "Mme. Le Jay, if probity did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it as a means of enriching oneself."

† Le Sage. *Crispin rival de son maître. Sc. XIV.*

On his return to his sister's house (his own home having been sold up by his creditors at the instance of La Blache, he was living with Mme. Lépine), he told his friends there assembled of the judge's strange bearing, and begged Bertrand Dairolles to seek a second audience through Mme. Goëzman. She replied that since her husband had made only empty criticisms, it was obvious that these were the only ones which could be offered to the justice of his cause; that he need have no inquietude as to the strange smile he had detected on the judge's face, as it was habitual with him; and, finally, if he would submit any observations he had to make on the judge's remarks, she would undertake to place them before him.

Three days later Goëzman decided against him, and he lost his case.*

The same evening Mme. Goëzman sent Bertrand Dairolles to Beaumarchais with the one hundred louis and the watch, but as to the fifteen louis, which had been asked for as a gift for her husband's secretary, she considered that he was not justified in expecting them to be returned.

Now Goëzman's secretary was an honest fellow, who had fallen among thieves, for Beaumarchais, on the occasion of his interview with the judge, had already had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to accept a present of ten louis for his services in arranging for the audience; so he could not understand why he should suddenly demand fifteen louis. He, therefore, called upon him, and soon found that he knew nothing about the matter, and, indeed, wanted to refund the amount he had already received. It was clear that Mme. Goëzman had herself appropriated the money.

Beaumarchais was so indignant at this meanness, that, in spite of the danger of such a course, he determined to write to her claiming the fifteen louis. His situation was already so desperate that he thought it could not well be much worse. Moreover, he was convinced that he had lost his case only because La Blache had given the judge more money than he himself had offered to secure an audience, and in these circumstances he saw a chance of convicting Goëzman of corruption, and, above all, of getting the unjust decision of the court reversed. In this

* Arrêt du Parlement, 6 Avril, 1773.

he was singularly ill-advised, for has not one of the wisest of men said : "Go not to law with a judge, for they will judge for him according to his honour."

As he had anticipated, Mme. Goëzman, being obliged either to acknowledge the misappropriation of the fifteen louis and giving them back, or to deny having received them, chose the latter course. She evidently hoped to be able to keep this little transaction secret from her husband. She boldly declared that Beaumarchais, through a third person, had offered her one hundred louis and a watch to secure her husband's favourable decision in the La Blache case, but that she had rejected his criminal proposal with indignation. To the letter of Beaumarchais claiming the fifteen louis she made no reply, but the following day his sister, Mme. Lépine, came to tell him that Lejay was at her house in a state of extreme agitation because Mme. Goëzman had sent for him and bitterly complained that Beaumarchais demanded of her the sum of one hundred louis and a watch ornamented with diamonds, which she had already instructed Lejay to return to him. He said it was cruel of Beaumarchais to deny having received them, and that Mme. Goëzman was furiously angry, and threatened to use the influence of a certain duke to ruin them both. Mme. Lépine said they had tried in vain to make the unhappy bookseller understand that Mme. Goëzman was merely equivocating, and that the only question now under discussion was the fifteen louis. Beaumarchais at once gave his sister a copy of the letter (he was always an admirably methodical business man) to show to Lejay, who, convinced at last, promised to go straightway to Mme. Goëzman and tax her with bad faith. But though the spirit was willing the flesh, in his case, was weak, and in his terror at finding himself in conflict with a judge, he failed to keep his promise. Beaumarchais wrote two further letters on the subject, which remained unanswered.

From the outset of his inquiries, and in spite of the categorical denials of his wife, Goëzman must have seen that she had received and kept the hundred louis and the watch until after the judgment in the La Blache case, and that she had diverted to her own use and still retained the compromising fifteen louis ; but in view

of the misfortune and discredit into which his antagonist had fallen, he thought he would never dare persevere in his claim, and risk all the dread consequences for such a paltry sum, and even if he did nobody would believe him

Before going further, however, he attempted to make doubly sure of his victim's ruin by writing a little confidential note to M. de Sartine (which afterwards came into the hands of Beaumarchais), asking him as a special favour to rid him of this tiresome litigant by means of a *lettre de cachet*.* But by this time Beaumarchais had seen to it that all Paris was talking of the fatal fifteen louis, and the already unpopular Government dared not risk the suggested outrage. Failing on this side, Goëzman summoned Lejay to his study, and frightened him into copying out and signing a statement, which he himself had drawn up, retracting what he had previously said and supporting the false testimony of Mme. Goëzman.

Having made sure of Lejay, he at once denounced Beaumarchais to the Parlement, confidently counting on an easy triumph over his stricken adversary, who now found himself on trial on a criminal charge before judges whose interest it was to find him guilty.† At that period, it was the practice to try, and to judge, such cases behind closed doors, and the penalty was, short of capital punishment, the severest known to the law. Any other man would have trembled at the odds against him, but Beaumarchais was never so dangerous, never so completely master of his mind, his nerves, himself, as when thoroughly cornered. In the present cruel dilemma he boldly appealed to public opinion. Since he could find no advocate sufficiently courageous to defend him, he would plead his case himself, and he would publish it on the housetops. "He would trample underfoot," says Louis de Loménie, "the time-honoured regulations prescribing secrecy in criminal cases, which prevented the nation from judging the judges, and whilst they prepared to strangle him in the dark, he would introduce light everywhere, and call public opinion to his aid; but in order that the public should respond to the appeal of a man

* Letter dated 5 June, 1773.

† The autograph denunciation is among the *Archives nationales*.

unknown, or very unfavourably known, it was essential that he should have the art of attracting his readers, of holding them, of arousing their indignation, their passion, their pity, and at the same time amusing them. The situation is such that Beaumarchais is obliged—we might almost say under pain of death—to display a marvellous talent in extracting from a dull lawsuit all the interest of a drama, a comedy, a romance."

He throws conventional arguments to the winds; he presses into the service of his cause lively details of the manners and customs of his time, equally lively narratives of his exceptionally adventurous life, and audacious discussions on the burning political questions of the day. He is coldly analytical, ironical, magnanimous, gaily defiant of the injustice of those in authority, merciless towards any kind of pretension, witty, pathetic, eloquent, with uncontrollable outbursts of boisterous fun; consistently daring, cheerful, and debonnair amid the most alarming difficulties.

A few days before the trial the presiding judge sent for Beaumarchais to ask him what truth there was in the current rumours; but he refused to make any statement until forced to do so in court. "Let my enemies attack me if they dare," he said, "then I will speak; I will never believe that an honourable body such as the Parlement will be unjust and partial merely to serve the hatred of certain individuals. As to the declaration of Lejay, that will soon turn against those who fabricated it. I have never seen the Sieur Lejay; but he is said to be an honest man, whose only fault (that of all weak people) is to have allowed himself to be easily frightened and led into falsehood by others; but when he comes before the Recorder he will never hold to the false declaration which was extorted from him by Goëzman in his study, and at the first cross-examination the truth will ooze out by all the pores of his skin. So, without uneasiness in that respect and full of confidence in the equity of my judges, I shall not readily lose my peace of mind."*

Lejay now began to fear the consequences of his falsehood, and his uneasy conscience led him to consult M. Gerbier, an upright and justly celebrated barrister, who

* *Mémoire* (*No.* 1), Ed. Furne, pp. 29, 30.

advised him to tell the truth and to stick to it. Lejay took the advice, and told everybody whom he found willing to listen to his story. Goëzman, hearing of this change of front, sent for the bookseller and his wife, and having adroitly extracted from them the draft of the false statement in his own handwriting, reproached the couple bitterly for their inconstancy. Mme. Lejay (the better man of the two), in spite of the judge's threats, declared that nothing should prevent them from telling the truth.* Goëzman next tried to persuade the bookseller to fly to Holland, offering to pay his expenses and to settle the affair during his absence. Mme. Lejay resolutely refused to let her husband go.

This new manœuvre, of course, got to the ears of Beaumarchais; and he lost no time in reporting the matter to the presiding judge.

On being examined by the Recorder, Lejay, his wife and his clerk all swore that the original draft of the first declaration had been written by Goëzman, that the clerk had made several copies of it, and that Lejay had been induced to sign the document, which had two or three days later been appropriated by the judge.

Mme. Goëzman, on being examined in her turn, said very little, and pretended that she had had nothing to do with the affair. On the completion of this preliminary inquiry, Lejay was arrested and imprisoned, whilst Bertrand Dairolles and Beaumarchais were placed under surveillance, and ordered to hold themselves in readiness to appear before the court.

Marin, the author of the *Gazette de France*, now came forward as a mediator, and was charged by Beaumarchais to tell Goëzman that he did not fear his threats, as he had already done him as much harm as it was in his power to do. "You can, however, assure him," said Beaumarchais, "that I shall not take a disloyal advantage of certain circumstances which have come to my knowledge to cause him public vexation, so long as he has the goodness to leave me alone." Marin promised to submit these observations to Goëzman, but strongly advised Beaumarchais to drop his ridiculous references to the fifteen louis, as they had no

* Dumont (E.), *Souvenirs sur Mirabeau*, p. 86. "He [Lejay] trembled like a child before his wife."

bearing on the case and made him appear to be extremely mean. Beaumarchais told him that, on the contrary, the fifteen louis alone could save him. He saw that Marin knew this as well as he did, and that he had made the suggestion treacherously in the interests of Goëzman, and even, perhaps, at the instigation of the Parlement. Throughout the case, in fact, Marin proved himself to be at once the ablest and the most perfidious of his adversaries.

Goëzman next tried to throw over his wife and have her imprisoned in a convent, but this did not prevent her from being called upon to give evidence.

At the examination before the Recorder, the only witness whom Mme. Goëzman appeared to fear was Mme. Lejay, and it must be owned that her evidence was very damaging. She stated that Mme. Goëzman had said to her and her husband that she never intended to return the fifteen louis, and " all she regretted was not having kept the hundred louis and the watch as well, for the trouble to-day would have been no more and no less if she had done so, but she was unable to overcome the scruples of Lejay."

Utterly discountenanced by this evidence, Mme. Goëzman nearly fainted, and asked for a glass of water ; on recovering herself all she could find to say was :

" Madame, we are here to tell the truth. Have I ever conducted myself improperly whilst joking with the people who have happened to be in your shop when I have called upon you ? "

" No, Madame ; nor have I said any such thing in my deposition."

" I beg you to say, Madame, if I have ever gone upstairs alone with M. Lejay into his room, and if I have ever remained there locked in with him, so as to give rise to tattle and mockery ? "

" Good Heavens, Madame ! You surprise me with your strange questions. What has all this to do with the business which brings us here ? We are concerned with a hundred louis which you received, and fifteen louis which you still hold, and not with your private interviews with my husband, of which nobody complains."

" Madame, I declare before all that I have returned the hundred louis and the watch. As for the fifteen louis,

that is nobody's business: it is a matter entirely between M. Lejay and myself."

These words, uttered in a trembling voice, and interspersed with a few tears, were all that she could be induced to say in the presence of Mme. Lejay.

After many excuses and failures to keep her appointments, Mme. Goëzman was at length brought face to face with Beaumarchais.

When the oath had been administered and the clerk had registered their names and station, they were asked if they knew each other.

"As for that, no," replied Mme. Goëzman. "I neither know nor wish to know him!"

"Nor have I the honour of knowing Madame," Beaumarchais answered the same question; "but on seeing her I cannot help forming a wish entirely different from hers."

On being asked what grievances she had against him, she said: "Put down that I accuse and challenge him because he is my chief enemy, and because he is well-known throughout Paris to be an odious person."

Her reply was duly committed to writing, and Beaumarchais in his turn interrogated, said:

"I have no reproach to make against Madame, not even for the little irritation which she shows at this moment, but I much regret that my first opportunity of offering her my respectful compliments should be due to a criminal suit. As to the wickedness of my character, I hope to be able to prove to her by the moderation of my replies and my respectful bearing that her counsel has misinformed her."

The examination lasted over eight hours in two sittings. The Recorder then read over the evidence aloud, and asked Mme. Goëzman if she had any observations to make.

"Indeed, no," she said, smiling at the magistrate; "what should I say to all this stuff and nonsense. Monsieur must surely have a lot of time on his hands to write down such a rigmarole."

"Make your deposition, Madame," said the official, "for I must warn you that afterwards it will be too late."

"But, sir, what about? . . . I do not understand. . . . Oh, write down that, generally speaking,

Monsieur's replies are false, and have been suggested to him."

Beaumarchais smiled. She asked why.

"Because, Madame, I gather from your exclamation that you had suddenly remembered this part of your lesson, though you certainly might have applied it more happily. On many of the subjects dealt with in my evidence you could not possibly know whether my replies were true or false. With regard to *suggestion*, you have certainly confused matters, for being regarded by your counsel as the head of a clique (your own term) you must have been told that I suggested the replies of others, not that mine were suggested to me. But have you nothing in particular to say of the letter I had the honour of writing to you, which procured me the interview with M. Goëzman ? "

"Certainly, sir. . . . Wait a moment. . . . Er . . . write : As regards the alleged interview . . . the alleged interview . . . "

But Mme. Goëzman was unable to proceed. She became involved in a maze of half-remembered legal terms and circumlocutions which she did not understand, "and had clearly not been taught at her convent."

The magistrate came to her rescue :

"Well, Madame, what do you mean by alleged interview. Do not bother about the words ; make sure of your ideas ; explain yourself clearly, and I will faithfully record your evidence."

"I want to say, sir, that I have nothing to do with the affairs or the interviews of my husband. I am occupied solely with my household ; so if Monsieur gave a letter to my footman, it is an additional proof of his perfidy, which I will maintain against all and everybody."

"Will you kindly explain, Madame," asked Beaumarchais, "what perfidy you can possibly find in such a simple action as handing a letter to a servant ? "

After a long and embarrassed silence, she said :

"If it is true that Monsieur delivered a letter at my house, to which of my servants did he give it ? "

"He was a fair-haired young man, who said he belonged to you, Madame."

"Ah, that is a pretty contradiction ! " she cried.

" Put down that Monsieur gave a letter to a young, fair-haired footman ; but my footman is not fair-haired : his hair is light auburn ; and if you saw my footman, what is my livery like ? "

" I did not know that Madame had a particular livery," answered the astonished Beaumarchais.

" Please write down that Monsieur, who spoke to my footman, does not know that I have a particular livery, whereas I have two : one for the winter and one for the summer."

" Madame," replied Beaumarchais, " I have so little intention to dispute your two liveries, that I seem to remember the footman was in a spring morning jacket, for it was on the third of April. Forgive me if I failed to explain myself clearly. As it was natural to suppose that, when you married, your servants doffed your livery to don that of the Goëzmans, I was unable to distinguish from his dress whether the lacquey in question belonged to Monsieur or Madame. On this delicate point I was, therefore, compelled to trust to the insecurity of his word. However, whether his hair was fair or light auburn ; whether he was in the Goëzman or the Jamar* livery, it is nevertheless true that, before irreproachable witnesses, M. Falconnet and the Sieur Santerre, a footman, professing to be yours, received from me on the landing of your staircase a letter which he refused at first to take, as he said that Monsieur was with Madame, but which he at length delivered, upon my reassuring him, and returned with the verbal answer : 'You can go up to Monsieur's study ; he will be there in a moment,' as in fact he was."

" All this talk leads nowhere," said Mme. Goëzman. " You did not follow my footman up the stairs, so you cannot swear that he gave me the letter ; and I declare that I have never received a letter from you or on your behalf ; and that I had nothing whatever to do with procuring you this interview."

" Good God, Madame ! " exclaimed Beaumarchais. " Would you deliver us over to a still worse suspicion ? If you did not receive this letter from your footman, since it is proved that he had it from me, and the appearance of M. Goëzman tallies with the verbal reply of the 'light

* Her maiden name before marrying Goëzman at Strasburg.

auburn-haired young man,' we must conclude that this deceitful footman delivered the letter to your husband; this letter, Madame, by which you were summoned 'in accordance with your understanding with Lejay to procure me an interview;' we must conclude that this husband, no less fond than inquisitive, felt himself obliged, as a gallant man, to keep his wife's engagement, and . . . Complete the sentence, Madame; on my honour, I have not the courage to carry it any further! Decide which of you opened the letter that led to the interview; but if you persist in maintaining that it was not you, do not, at any rate, tell us that I am compromising M. Goëzman in this affair; for it is proved up to the hilt that it is you yourself who are compromising him."

"Hold your tongue, sir!" cried Mme. Goëzman, angrily; "it would take us till to-morrow morning to reply to so many impertinencies. I hold to what I said, and will not add another word."

"What, Madame!" exclaimed the astonished Beaumarchais. "Is there a living man so much his own enemy as to confide to you his honour and the conduct of such a grave intrigue! Pardon me, but I am less amazed at you than at the counsel who has put you forward to maintain such a cause."

"Well, sir, what is there so surprising in what has just been read, if you please?"

"You are a very charming woman, Madame, but you are absolutely lacking in memory, and that is what I shall have the honour of proving to you to-morrow morning."

Just before the sitting closed, Mme. Goëzman turned on Beaumarchais and said:

"Cruel wretch! my statements have just been read, and you put off your replies until to-morrow, merely to give you time to invent fresh villainies against me, but I declare, you odious fellow, that unless you give me a full answer, without preparation, here and now, you will not be admitted in the morning?"

She, apparently, thought her husband had power to forbid the court to her antagonist.

Amused at this idle threat, even more than he was offended by the insulting words which accompanied it, Beaumarchais laughingly replied:

"Very well, Madame; I will give you satisfaction. It is nearly ten o'clock, but before we adjourn, I call upon you here and now, without preparation, to tell us how it is that, in all your statements, you declare yourself to be thirty years old, whereas your looks belie you and clearly show you to be only eighteen!" and he bowed deeply to her as he turned to go out.

But Madame Goëzman was so little offended by the compliment, that she asked him to give her his arm and conduct her to her carriage. The pair, arm in arm, now prepared to leave the court, but M. Frémin, "best of men, if gravest of Recorders," considered it necessary to point out to them how unbecoming it was, under the circumstances, to be seen leaving the court together. Beaumarchais thereupon saluted her with another compliment, which drew from her a pleased smile, and turned homewards.

Although she had promised to attend the court at ten o'clock the following morning, it was not until four in the afternoon that she put in an appearance.

"To-day, Madame," said Beaumarchais, "I take the offensive, and this is my plan. We are going to review your evidence and verification. I shall make my observations on them, but every time you insult me, I shall instantly avenge myself by making you fall into fresh contradictions."

"Fresh ones, sir? Are there any in what I have said?"

"Good God, Madame! your evidence swarms with them; but I admit that it is still more surprising not to have seen them in writing your deposition than to have made them in dictation."

He thereupon took up the papers to run through them.

"Do you mean to say," cried Mme. Goëzman, "that Monsieur is allowed to read all that they have made me write?"

"That is a right, Madame, which I intend to use only with every consideration for you. In your first examination, for instance, to sixteen questions on the same subject, namely, whether you received one hundred louis from Lejay to procure an interview for the Sieur de Beaumarchais, I see to the honour of your discretion that the sixteen

replies bear no superfluous ornaments," and he proceeded to read the statement as sworn to by her.

"Asked if she had received one hundred louis, replied: 'That is false.' If she put them away in a cardboard scent box: 'That is not true.' If she kept them until after the verdict: 'An abominable lie,' etc., etc."

Yet, at the second examination, when pressed on the same subject, Mme. Goëzman had answered freely: 'It is true that Lejay offered her one hundred louis, that she kept them in her desk for a night and a day, but solely to oblige poor Lejay, because he is a good fellow, who did not see any harm in it, and who, besides, made himself useful in selling her husband's books; and because it would have been tiring for him to carry this money about with him during his hours of business.'

"As these replies are absolutely contrary to the first, I beg you, Madame, to be good enough to tell us which of the two you wish us to accept on this important subject?"

"Neither the one nor the other!" snapped this elusive controversialist. "All I said then signifies nothing. I hold to what I stated on the verification of my evidence, which alone contains the truth."

"It must be conceded, Madame, that this method of denying one's own evidence after denying that of everybody else, would be the most convenient of all if it could possibly succeed. But until it is adopted by the Parlement, let us examine what you said on these hundred louis in your verification."

Beaumarchais then pressed her to show why she had sworn to three different versions of the affair. She replied that, owing to a temporary indisposition (the details of which she confided to the court in spite of the sharp rebuke of Beaumarchais) she did not know what she was saying.

"If I that day denied having received or held the money, it was apparently because that was my pleasure, but, as I have already said and repeat for the last time, I intend to abide by what I stated in the verification of my evidence; I am sorry if that displeases you!"

"Me, Madame? On the contrary, you could not have given me an answer more to my liking. I can assure you it pleases me so much that I would not for the world have

a single word altered. . . . Since this is your last word, permit me to make one observation."

"Egad, sir, you are as talkative as a woman!"

"Without admitting that quality either for the ladies or myself," coolly pursued Beaumarchais, "do not be offended, Madame, if I insist on begging you to tell us whom you sent three times to poor Lejay to ask him to take back the hundred louis; these treacherous hundred louis which he had furtively slipped into your Italian scent-box when you were not looking?"

"I have no account to render to you . . . write that down," she said, turning to the clerk, "and that he is only pressing me thus with questions to make me contradict myself."

The President here intervened to demand a more categorical answer to the question.

"Very well, sir, since it is absolutely necessary to name him. It was my footman whom I sent; you can call him if you like."

"I beg you to consider well your reply, Madame," gravely remarked the President, "for if the footman denies having been sent to Lejay's, you will find yourself in a very serious position."

"I know nothing about it, sir; however, write if you like that it was not my footman, but a Savoyard, for there are any number of these porters on the Quai de Saint Paul, where I live. Monsieur has only to make inquiries, if the game amuses him."

"I shall do nothing of the sort, Madame," answered Beaumarchais, "and I beg to offer you my thanks for the manner in which you have thrown light on the hundred louis: I trust that the court will be in no more doubt than I am to decide whether you 'rejected them openly and with indignation,' or whether you put them by discreetly and with satisfaction."

"And now," he pursued, "let us pass on to another matter not less interesting; that of the fifteen louis."

"Are you going to repeat, sir, that I admit having received them?"

"I am not so presumptuous, Madame, as to expect a formal avowal, but I confess that I count sufficiently on small contradictions to hope, with the help of God and the

Recorder, to be able to disperse the mist which still obscures the truth." He begged her to answer without reservation or qualification whether she had not demanded fifteen louis through Lejay for the secretary, and whether when she received them, she had not locked them in her desk."

" I answer clearly and without qualification, that Lejay has never spoken to me of fifteen louis, and has never offered them to me."

" May I point out, Madame," observed Beaumarchais, " that it would be more meritorious to say : ' I refused the money,' than to maintain that you know nothing about it."

" I maintain, sir, that nothing has ever been said to me about this money. Is it likely that anybody would dare offer fifteen louis to a woman in my position—to me, who had refused a hundred the day before ? "

" To which day do you refer, Madame ? " instantly inquired Beaumarchais.

" To be sure, sir, the day before——" she broke off suddenly, and bit her lip.

" You mean the day before that on which nobody had spoken to you of the fifteen louis, do you not ? " suggested Beaumarchais.

" Hold your tongue ! " she cried, springing to her feet in a passion, " or I will box your ears ! I have heard quite enough of these fifteen louis. You are trying to confuse and catch me with your wicked little twisted phrases ; but I swear I will not answer another word ; " and she fanned herself vigorously to cool her hot face.

The Recorder here interposed to ask whether it was really necessary to go further into this matter which appeared to offend the lady so much.

" I cannot understand why Madame should feel hurt," said Beaumarchais, " since I was careful to show that the sum in question was asked, not for herself, but for the secretary. However, let us say no more about ' the hundred louis rejected the day before—before that on which nobody had spoken to her of the fifteen louis ' since this matter troubles the peace of our conference ; but I ask pardon and privilege for my question : the true import of principles is often revealed only by the inferences that

are drawn from them. I beg you, therefore, to write exactly: 'Mme. Goëzman asserts that nobody has ever spoken to her of the fifteen louis, nor proposed that she should accept them.'"

Beaumarchais now asked the Recorder to place before her the copy of the letter (submitted to the court by Lejay) acknowledging the receipt of the hundred louis and the watch, and pointing out that the fifteen louis had not been returned.

At first Mme. Goëzman angrily denied all knowledge of such a communication, and asserted that the letter she had received from Beaumarchais was an insignificant scrap of paper having nothing whatever to do with this matter and that, after reading it, she had thrown it away.

Beaumarchais now read aloud the record of Mme. Goëzman's second examination: "All that Mme. Goëzman recollects is that she received a letter from the Sieur de Beaumarchais which made her very angry, for she understood him to say that he had not received the hundred louis and the watch and the fifteen louis; that she had immediately sent for Lejay to ascertain whether he had returned the former sum and the watch; that Lejay had pointed out that she had mistaken the contents of the letter, which complained only of the withholding of the fifteen louis, and not of the other items, which he had given back before several witnesses; and that on comparing this copy with the original she acknowledged it to be an exact transcription and tore up the original."

"Are we quits, Madame? Let us count. I see here two, three, four round contradictions: First, you never received any letter from me; next you did receive one but it was of no importance; then suddenly this insignificant scrap of paper is transformed into a very irritating letter which, on your own showing, tallied in every way with the copy now before you. Yet to-day you declare that you have no knowledge of this letter, this scrap of paper, and that it has nothing to do with the letter you received from me. Does this appear to you sufficiently clear, positive, and contradictory? What have you to say to this?"

"Nothing is easier to explain, sir. Did I not tell you that on the day of my second examination when

I admitted having received and locked up the hundred louis and thoughtlessly told this story of the letter and the fifteen louis, I did not know what I was saying, I was in such a state. . . ? "

" Deign to come out of it, occasionally, Madame, if not out of consideration for us, then at least out of respect for yourself ! Can you not find a more modest and less fantastic means of disguising your defeat ? Meanwhile, until a new article is added to the criminal code, in the sense of your evidence, you will plead in vain for the same indulgence for bad faith which is accorded to bad health."

Beaumarchais proceeded to show that she was truthful only when she declared that she did not know what she was saying.

" Since, Madame, you claim, somewhat frequently, the honour of losing your head and your memory, would it not be better to make use of this innocent resource to return to the path of truth rather than to wander further and further from it ? "

" A foolish question deserves no reply," retorted Mme. Goëzman. Then, after a pause :

" Even if all were true that had been admitted at the second examination, this would not prove that I have received the fifteen louis."

" Far more than you think, Madame ; for it is easy to see that you seek to evade all inquiry into the fifteen louis only to avoid suspicion of having exacted, received, and kept them. But, as it is easier to deny all knowledge of this money than to get away from the overwhelming proof that you did receive it, I will abandon the light tone which your insults made me momentarily adopt, to assure you that your defence, even more deplorable than ridiculous, places you in a most invidious light. To keep fifteen louis, Madame, is a small matter ; but to put the blame on the unfortunate Lejay (and it needed only a little more adroitness on your part to ruin him utterly) is a crime, an enormity, which might not be so astonishing in certain men, but will always be appalling when coming from the mouth of a woman, since we justly believe that calculated wickedness of this kind is foreign to her nature."

CHAPTER XIV

HOW "LOUIS XV. DESTROYED THE OLD PARLEMENT AND FIFTEEN LOUIS THE NEW" (*continued*)

IN spite of the great provocation he had received, the first memoir of Beaumarchais is marked by moderation and freedom from personalities. He is far more concerned with defending himself than with inculpating Goëzman; but the pamphlet was no sooner published, than there appeared, in rapid succession, five separate and extremely violent replies. The first was signed by Mme. Goëzman, consisting of seventy-four quarto pages of clumsy abuse, stiff with learned phrases and Latin quotations, which drew from Beaumarchais the remark: "They announce to me an artless woman, and I find myself opposed by a German publicist." Goëzman had yet to learn that it is easy to write works which nobody can read.

When Mme. Goëzman sneered at his humble birth and his father's calling, he parried the thrust in a passage which has become justly famous in French literature:

"You begin this masterpiece," he said, "by twitting me on the social position of my ancestors. Alas! Madame, it is only too true that the last of them combined several branches of business with some celebrity in the art of watchmaking. Being obliged to plead guilty on this count, I admit with sorrow that nothing can purge me of your just reproach of being the son of my father . . . but I stay my hand, for I feel him leaning over my shoulder, laughing and embracing me as I write.

"Oh, you, who taunt me with my father, you have no idea of his generous heart!—truly, watchmaking apart, I know of nobody for whom I would exchange him! But I know too well the value of time, which he taught me to measure, to waste it in replying to such imbecilities.

"Not everybody, like M. Goëzman, can say:

Je suis fils de bailli, oui.
Je ne suis pas Caron, non.

However, before declaring myself on this subject, I intend to seek advice whether I ought to take exception to your ransacking my family archives, in order to remind me of my ancient origin, which was almost forgotten. Do you know that I can show proof of nearly twenty years of nobility; that this nobility is my very own, on genuine parchment, stamped with the great seal in yellow wax; that it does not, like that of many people, rest on tradition and uncertainty? Nobody can dispute my title, for I have the receipt!"

Such a combination of gay insolence and good-humour must have been hard to forgive, and the fact that in laughing at his enemies he also laughed at himself did not help to mend matters, for disagreeable people always resent good nature in others.

Mme. Goëzman complained of his bearing at the confrontation: "You dared," she wrote, "in the presence of the Commissary and the Recorder, to say that if I trusted myself to you, you would see that I was not imprisoned by my husband. You carried your impudence even further; you dared to add—why am I compelled to report suggestions so insulting and humiliating to me?—you dared to add, I say, that you would end by making yourself heard; that one day your attentions would not displease me; that . . . I dare not proceed, I dare not characterize you!"

"Fie! upon your dots!" retorted Beaumarchais. "You must dare, Madame, you must proceed; you must characterize me. What do you mean by your dots? You put strange reticencies into your memoirs. . . .

"I replied to all your insults only by compliments, which your alert *amour propre* took in good or bad part just as it pleased you to understand them. You give me a pretty reputation with your dots! What woman of repute will admit me to her house unless I destroy the impression which you give here of my gallant respect for the ladies? What woman would dare trust herself alone with me if she thought that the wife of my enemy, boiling

with rage against me, and even in the presence of the judge and the Recorder, ran such risks with me as to demand dots in attempting to describe them, and that she thinks herself entitled to arraign me as an audacious, shameless fellow: I, who in her presence was nothing but a very, very modest person anxious only to defend himself against his accusers?"

Having refuted, courted, teased, cajoled, bewildered and confounded Mme. Goëzman, Beaumarchais next turns to her husband. Here his manner changes. His banter and flippancy give place to gravity and close reasoning. He harasses his enemy step by step, taking extreme care, however, to avoid wounding the susceptibilities of his judges. With the greatest ingenuity he at length succeeds in proving conclusively, from internal evidence, that the false deposition of Lejay was dictated by Mme. Goëzman from a draft drawn up by her husband, and that the bookseller's illiterate copy was afterwards altered by the judge, from memory, in order to make sense. In the course of his argument, Beaumarchais quotes with telling effect the naïve exclamation of Mme. Lejay when this copy was shown to her: "It is undoubtedly my husband's writing, but I am quite certain it is not his style: he is not clever enough to think of all those fine phrases."

It was at this point that his enemies began to circulate their cowardly insinuations respecting "the sudden death of his three wives," though he had been married only twice—and he was driven to defend himself publicly against these charges. Then, and then only, he determined to pursue his enemies to the death.

It was an ill day for Goëzman when he pushed matters to these extremes, for Beaumarchais immediately set about inquiring into his enemy's past life. His researches were soon rewarded by finding irrefutable evidence that his accuser, in order to escape the consequences of an intrigue with a working-class girl named Marie Sophie Dubillon, had given a false name and address, at the Church of Saint Jacques de la Boucherie, when registering the birth of her child, and had then disappeared. On making this timely discovery, Beaumarchais at once turned the tables on his pursuer, and brought his criminal offence

to the notice of his fellow magistrates, who were compelled to take steps against their colleague.

Beaumarchais was, nevertheless, cruelly wounded by Goëzman's calumnies, which drew from him this appeal :

" Oh, you, my friends, who have known me all my life, say if you have ever seen in me anything worse than a constantly gay and genial man, loving study and pleasure with an equal passion ; inclined to raillery, but without bitterness, and enjoying any well-seasoned pleasantry against himself ; maintaining perhaps rather too warmly his opinion when he thinks himself in the right, but free from envy and always ready to honour and esteem superiority wherever found ; trustful to the point of negligence ; active under the spur, but indolent and easy-going after the storm ; careless in good fortune, but supporting misfortune with a constancy and equanimity which astonishes his most familiar friends.

" How then is it, that a well-intentioned citizen, of honourable life, finds himself so pitilessly defamed ? How is it that a man, good and sociable abroad and sober and benevolent at home, finds himself the target of a thousand envenomed shafts ? This is the riddle of my life. I would I could solve it ! I know that in the past the august protection which I enjoyed drew upon me dangerous enemies who still pursue me : that I can understand. I know that a few dramas and several notorious quarrels have given but too much occasion for public curiosity on my account ; that my profound contempt for base aspersions upon my character may have exasperated the spiteful, who do not like to feel their impotence ; that a vain reputation for some small cleverness may have offended some very small rivals, who have proceeded thence to deny me more solid qualities. Perhaps a just resentment, aggravating my natural pride, has made me hard and cutting when I thought myself only nervous and concise. In society, when I thought myself only free and easy, perhaps I appeared to others presumptuous. Anything you like, gentlemen ; but even if I was a coxcomb, does it follow that I was an ogre ? * . . . Oh, my dear enemies, you do not know your business. Forgive my offering you a little

* A subtle allusion to the alleged murder of his two wives.

piece of advice: if you are absolutely bent on injuring me, at least make it possible for others to believe you!"

Beaumarchais now turned his attention to Bertrand Dairolles, a kind of stockjobber, who had at first taken his part and told the truth, but had afterwards recanted and gone over to the interests of Mme. Goëzman. The enmity of the weak is less dangerous than their friendship, so at first Beaumarchais dealt with him quite considerately. Bertrand, an indecisive person who had unaccountably blundered into the fray, sought to strike terror into his antagonist by calling him names: "A cynical orator," he cried, "a buffoon, a shameless sophist; a lying painter who draws from his soul the mud with which he sullies the robe of innocence, wicked from necessity and from inclination, his hard, vindictive and implacable heart is giddy with his momentary triumph, and he remorselessly tramples underfoot all right human feeling."

To this diatribe, Beaumarchais replied by painting the ridiculous Bertrand just as he was: garrulous, keen on money and not over particular how he got it ("Every question has two sides; just as every stockjobber has two hands"), shifty, timid and rash, more of a fool than a knave.

Goëzman's second champion was Arnaud-Baculard, a sentimental story-writer and playwright of some reputation, who, wishing to curry favour with the judge, wrote him a letter containing a false statement. When Beaumarchais politely pointed this out to him in his first memoir, he replied: "Yes, I was walking when I met the Sieur Caron in his carriage, *in his carriage!*" Beaumarchais, remembering the incident quite well, said he thought Arnaud looked gloomy. This made the little man very angry: "I did not look gloomy, but concerned," he wrote. "Gloomy looks are suited only to those who meditate crime, who are trying to stifle remorse and to do evil. . . . There are some hearts in which I tremble to read what I see—in which I measure all the gloomy depths of hell! It is then that I cry: 'Thou sleepest, Jupiter! What is the use of thy thunderbolt!'"

If Arnaud is not vicious, it is at any rate not for want

of trying. Now comes the serene and dignified answer of Beaumarchais :

" In his carriage, you repeat, with a great note of admiration. Who would not think from this sad : ' Yes, I was on foot,' and this great note of admiration running after my carriage, that you are envy personified ? But I, who know you for a good fellow—I know very well that this phrase : ' in his carriage ' does not mean that you were angry to see me in my carriage, but only because I did not see you in yours.

" But console yourself, sir, the carriage in which I was driving was no longer mine when you saw me in it. The Comte de la Blache had caused it to be seized with all my other goods : blue-coated men, with threatening muskets slung over their shoulders, kept it and all my other belongings constantly under their eyes at my house, and, before I could cause you the annoyance of showing myself to you ' in my carriage,' I had that very day humbly to ask permission—with my hat in one hand and a good crown in the other—of these tipstaves to use it, which—no offence to you—I do every morning ; and even whilst I speak to you so calmly, the same misery still pervades my house.

" How unjust we are ! We hate and are jealous of the man we think happy, who would give anything to be in the position of the pedestrian who detests him because of his carriage. Take me for an example. Is there anything more calculated to distress me than my actual situation ?—but there, I am rather like Héloïse's cousin, cry as I will, a laugh is sure to slip out from some corner or other !* That is what makes me so gentle with you. My philosophy is to be, as far as I can, content with myself and to leave the rest on the knees of the gods.

" Pardon me, sir," he concludes, " if I have not given you an answer all to yourself, for every insult contained in your memoir ; pardon me if, seeing you ' measure the gloomy depths of hell in my heart ' and exclaiming : '*Thou sleepest, Jupiter ! What is the use of thy thunderbolt?*' I have replied flippantly to so much bombast ; I beg you to excuse me, but you were no doubt once at

* A reference to the charming Claire d'Orbe in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse.*

school, and must know that the most inflated balloon needs only a pin-prick."

The apologists of Beaumarchais have been strangely unanimous in belittling the talents (though they have done full justice to the perfidy) of the third member of Goëzman's company of pamphleteers, for Marin was by far the ablest and most dangerous of them all. They may have been misled by the apparent ease with which Beaumarchais overwhelmed this treacherous adversary, and turned his poisoned weapons against himself. Fortunately, Beaumarchais knew his Marin, and had had too much experience in combats of this kind to give his enemy any chances, and however much he affected to despise him, it is evident that he feared this man more than all his other opponents put together.

A former schoolmaster, Marin had acquired the lucrative post of director of the *Gazette de France*, and in this capacity had carried the art of concocting and spreading false news to a state of great perfection. He was also an official censor of literature and the drama, and agent for the Chancellor Maupeou in the dissemination of pamphlets and other publications in support of the new Parlement. He was not above selling his pen to the highest bidder, and had fallen under suspicion of secretly trading in the rare and scandalous libels in verse and prose which served as an agreeable condiment to the literary fare of the fashionable circles of his day. It was, moreover, always difficult for him to tell the truth : he was a sort of congenital liar. Lastly he carried on an extensive business in accommodating with loans ladies and gentlemen in temporary monetary difficulties, and showed great ingenuity in worrying those who took advantage of his good offices.

Marin had no quarrel with Beaumarchais, but entered the lists on the side of his enemies from his habit of fishing in troubled waters and to please Chancellor Maupeou, who was becoming uneasy at the unexpected turn that the Goëzman lawsuit was taking. Having failed in his attempt to persuade Beaumarchais to abandon his accusation against Mme. Goëzman respecting the fifteen louis, and incidentally, to sacrifice Lejay, Marin, by a combination of flattery and threats, won over the mercurial Bertrand and caused him to deny all knowledge of this sum which

he at first admitted having himself transmitted to the judge's wife.

In his first pamphlet, Beaumarchais, intent upon setting out his case and vividly describing the events which led up to it, contented himself with simply parrying the thrusts of his opponents. Mistaking his moderation for weakness, Marin replied with a pamphlet of extreme violence, hoping, like Bertrand, to crush the discredited and ruined Beaumarchais at one blow. Having some years before published a work on Saladin, Marin apparently rather fancied himself as an Orientalist, and quoted as the motto of his memoir a translation from the Persian of Saadi: "Give not thy rice to the serpent, for the serpent will sting thee." But Beaumarchais had his own idea as to Marin's application of the proverb. So far from giving his rice to the serpent, he said, Marin had "spoiled him of his skin, enveloped himself in it, and crawled with as much ease as if he had done nothing else all his life."

As all the more reputable advocates refused to serve in a case where there was likely to be little to gain and much to lose, the first memoir of Beaumarchais was signed by himself and an obscure lawyer named Malbête. The opportunity was too good to be lost on the alert Marin, and he opened his attack by stating that a defamatory pamphlet was being distributed in Paris signed "Beaumarchais Malbête."

Quite a good joke, but Beaumarchais was a past master of the pun, and neatly parried the thrust:

"The author of the *Gazette de France*," he wrote, "complains of the calumnious falsehood and impropriety of the insults spread abroad in a pamphlet, signed, he says, *Beaumarchais Malbête*, and he attempts to justify himself in a little manifesto signed *Marin, qui n'est pas Malbête*."

In this battle of wits, however, Marin did not always come off second best, for we cannot doubt that it was he who inserted in Mme. Goëzman's memoir the justly celebrated jibe: "The Sieur Caron borrowed the name of Beaumarchais from one of his wives and lent it to one of his sisters"*; although in the original MS., which we have seen, the words are not in his handwriting. Beau-

* When Pierre Augustin adopted the name of Beaumarchais, he persuaded his favourite sister Julie to do likewise.

marchais was too great a humorist to begrudge his tribute to the excellence of this famous joke against himself.

If only Marin had conducted the controversy on such lines, Beaumarchais would never have resorted to the savagery of much of his writing against this most dangerous foe. But Marin's pamphlets are full of deadly insinuations, hints and allusions, combined with a sagacious economy of the truth, which destroy all the sympathy we might otherwise have had for him in his ultimate humiliation and ruin.

As an example of his methods we will quote his reference to the La Blache case :

"He (Beaumarchais) lost this lawsuit which so singularly compromised his honour and his fortune. He informed me of his misfortune: I was touched, and hastened to his prison to offer him the only help it was in my power to give—my sympathy and consolation. At last he was restored to liberty, and came to thank me for my attention, and although there were many persons, whom he did not know, in the room, he gave way to his usual indiscretion and spoke most imprudently against his reporter (Goëzman), against his superiors and against . . ." The stealthy Marin had great faith in the insinuating dotted line and constantly uses it most effectively. It would be impossible to hint more clearly or more discreetly that Beaumarchais was in the habit of talking wildly against the Parlement and against the Government.

In another place he gives it as his considered opinion that a man who defamed a good citizen, as Beaumarchais had defamed him, was deserving of capital punishment. Again and again he repeats that Beaumarchais says the most insulting things against the ministers and highly-placed personages, that he attacks religion and the magistrature, and if it were not that he (Marin) was too kind-hearted, he could easily prove that his adversary had committed the most odious crimes—he was, in fact, an out and out scoundrel.

In this controversy, Beaumarchais received considerable assistance from several of his relatives and friends such as the faithful Gudin, his brother-in-law Miron, and Gardanne, a Provençal doctor, whilst some of the best passages owe not a little to the piquant wit of his sister Julie. Hearing

of the collaboration, Marin went so far as to state that Beaumarchais was not the author of the memoirs published under his name. To this ridiculous charge, Pierre Augustin replied : " Since it is another who writes my memoirs, the clumsy Marin ought certainly to get him to write his own."

Beaumarchais gave the *coup-de-grâce* to his enemies in a sort of allegory, of which we will quote the concluding passage :

" If the Beneficent Being who watches over all, had one day honoured me with his presence, and had said : 'I am the beginning of all things ; without Me thou wouldst not exist ; I endowed thee with a healthy and robust body, a most active mind ; thou knowest with what profusion I poured sensibility into thy heart and shed gaiety over thy character. Without some sorrows to counterbalance thy fortunate lot thou wouldst have been too happy ; therefore, thou shalt be overwhelmed with calamities without number, defamed by a thousand enemies, deprived of thy goods and thy liberty, accused of rapine, falsehood, imposture, corruption, calumny ; groan under the disgrace of a criminal lawsuit, be bound with the fetters of a decree, attacked on every event of thy life by the most absurd rumours, and for long be made the sport of public opinion as to whether thou art the vilest of men or only an honest citizen.' "

Having humbly submitted himself to the decrees of Providence, he asks for one mercy—that he might be accorded such enemies as would try but not break down his courage, he then proceeds to pass them in review, painting each one maliciously to the life, and ending thus :

" I would desire that this man should be of a dull and awkward mind ; that his clumsy malice should for long have given him over to the hatred and contempt of the public ; above all, I would ask that he should be faithless to his friends, ungrateful to his benefactors, odious to authors by his censures, nauseous to readers by his writings, terrible to borrowers by his usury, dealing in forbidden books, spying on his hosts, fleecing strangers who trust him with their business, ruining the unhappy booksellers to enrich himself ; in fact, all men should have such an opinion of him that it would be sufficient to be accused by him to

be presumed an honest man, or to frequent his society to be with good reason suspect : give me Marin ! "

Envy and hatred are, in the long run, less injurious to those who inspire than to those who entertain them, and the ex-schoolmaster emerged from the combat a broken man. All Paris was laughing and jeering at him. He was soon compelled to relinquish his offices, and retired to his native town of Ciotat in Provençe, where he lived on the comfortable fortune he had amassed before his disgrace. After the Revolution he returned to Paris and recovered, to a certain extent, his position as a man of letters.

All society followed this case with breathless interest and ever-increasing excitement, whilst from every quarter applause and encouragement greeted :

> " Ce vain Beaumarchais, qui trois fois avec gloire :
> Mit le mémoire en drame et le drame en mémoire."*

The King read the pamphlets with amusement. Marie Antoinette brought into fashion a head-dress named after a gibe aimed at Marin. Mme. Du Barry caused scenes from the encounter of Mme. Goëzman and Beaumarchais before the Recorder to be played at Versailles. " What a man ! " wrote Voltaire to d'Alembert ; " he blends everything, pleasantry and gravity, reason and gaiety, strength and pathos, every kind of eloquence—all comes natural to him ; he confounds his adversaries and gives lessons to his judges. His unaffectedness enchants me, and I willingly forgive his indiscretion and his hastiness ! " And again : " I fear that this brilliant madcap will prove to be in the right against the whole world ! Heavens ! what rascalities ! what horrors ! what a disgrace to the nation ! what a vexation for the Parlement ! " †

The memoirs kept the Viennese court " merry throughout the winter "‡ ; and were read with hilarity by Catherine the Great, whilst their political aspect won the high appreciation of the sober thinkers on the other side of the

* Gilbert. " Satire I.," p. 33.

† Voltaire. " Correspondance générale." Vol. LVI.

‡ " Correspondance de Marie-Thérèse," T. ii., p. 225. Ed. Geoffroy et d'Arneth.

Atlantic. In Germany the addresses were just as eagerly discussed, and Goethe tells how at Frankfort he read them aloud with great success at a social function, when a girl friend suggested to him the idea of writing a drama on the Clavijo episode, which he undertook to complete ready to read to the same company the following week !*

From England, Horace Walpole wrote to Mme. du Deffand : " I have received the memoirs of Beaumarchais ; I am in the midst of the third, and it amuses me very much. The man is exceedingly adroit, reasons well, and has a great deal of wit ; his jests are often excellent, but he is too pleased with himself. Now I understand how, given the present state of affairs in your country, this case creates such a great sensation. I forgot to tell you my horror at the administration of justice among your people. Is there a country in the world where Mme. Goëzman would not have been severely punished ? Her deposition is a frightful piece of impudence. Are people allowed to lie and contradict themselves in this frantic manner ? What has become of this creature and her blackguardly husband ? Tell me, I beg you."†

The blind Marquise, who saw more than most people with normal sight, did not live long enough to give a complete answer to this question. If she had survived the Revolution, she would have been able to tell him that on the 7 Thermidor, Ann. II., two days before the fall of Robespierre, Goëzman was brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal, condemned, and executed with André Chénier, the Marquis de Montalembert, and others, for " having become an enemy of the people," or, more definitely, for complicity in the alleged conspiracy in Saint Lazare Prison.

Mme. Goëzman survived the Terror, and lived on into the nineteenth century. She fell on evil days, and had it not been for the timely and generous help of Beaumarchais, she would have become utterly destitute. At his death, she figures among the " hopeless debtors " for a sum of several thousands of francs, with Restif de la

* Goethe. *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Book XV., p. 213. Cotta's Edition, 1867.

† " Lettres de Mme. du Deffand," T. iii., p. 90. 1821 Edition, which contains several of Walpole's letters.

Bretonne, Dorat, Théveneau de Morande, and many others.

On the 22nd December, towards seven o'clock in the evening, Beaumarchais was summoned to be questioned at the bar of the Court. He confesses to a momentary misgiving on being admitted to that august assembly of sixty judges, whose eyes were all turned upon him. But the organ of veneration was not highly developed in him, and he soon recovered (if he ever lost) his composure. By clever manœuvring he seized the direction of the debate from the outset, and transformed the defendant's bench into a tribune, from which he addressed the whole country.

Carried away by his own eloquence, he gave the President Nicolai occasion to rebuke and remind him of the gulf between him and his judges; but he boldly questioned the propriety of his ruling, resisted the police officers who attempted to remove him, and calling the nation to witness the violence done him, tried to create a riot against the Parlement in the palace itself. Then suddenly making his submission to his judges, "he fell on his knees and humbly boxed their ears."

Yet he continually sang the praises of the French magistrature, leaving it to the public to discover the deadly thorns among the roses he showered upon the guardians of the law. Whilst that section of society which thought only of pleasure, excitement, and highly-seasoned scandal was delighted by his malice no less than by his gaiety, the serious people, who looked with foreboding to the future, were struck by his courage and ability, and soon began to number him among those daring and energetic spirits who were to build the new state. They, like Napoleon, later, recognized in him "a forerunner of the Revolution."

Long before the end of the case it became fairly clear that Beaumarchais, in spite of his denials, had certainly expected something more than audiences as a result of his gift to Mme. Goëzman. On the other hand, it was equally clear that Goëzman knew of his wife's venality and had supported her false testimony by forgery and subornation. It was impossible to strike the one party without condemning the other. The Court pronounced judgment

on the 26th February, 1774, condemning Beaumarchais and Mme. Goëzman to "blame"—a conviction which carried infamy and civil degradation. It afterwards transpired that Beaumarchais had escaped the pillory, branding, and the galleys by a majority of only six votes. Goëzman was deprived of his office. The day following the decree the memoirs of Beaumarchais were condemned to be publicly burnt; but all Europe had read and made merry over them, and he found himself the most popular man in France. The judgment was no sooner pronounced than all Paris, following the lead of the Prince de Conti and the Duc de Chartres, called upon him to enter their names in his visitors' book, and the public enthusiasm for the condemned man led M. de Sartine to say to him: "It is not enough to be blamed; it is also necessary to be modest."

But Beaumarchais was too good a judge of affairs to minimize for long the gravity of the sentence passed upon him. His ruin was complete. The Parlement Maupeou, however, did not long survive its triumph. In condemning Beaumarchais it dealt a mortal blow at its own existence. After the sentence, the opposition became more violent than ever, and on the death of Louis XV. one of the first acts of his successor was to re-establish the former Parlement.

CHAPTER XV

CONCERNING MLLE. WILLERMAULA AND THE THIRD MARRIAGE OF BEAUMARCHAIS

IN spite of his fame and popularity, Beaumarchais was too clear-sighted a judge of affairs to blind himself to his almost desperate situation. But he was, as Carlyle justly called him, " a tough, indomitable man," and life had taught him that the hopeful outlook is just as likely to be true as the hopeless : so why despair ?

Not least among the circumstances which enabled him to meet this ill-fortune with habitual cheerfulness, were the frankly offered sympathy and affection of a young and brilliant woman.

" His celebrity," writes Gudin, of this episode in his friend's career, " attracted to him a woman endowed with a tender heart and a firm character, well-fitted to sustain him in the cruel trials which were yet to fall to his lot. She did not know him, but the moving appeal of his memoirs found an echo in her soul. She ardently desired to meet him. I was with him when, on the pretext of a keen interest in music, she sent a mutual acquaintance to beg Beaumarchais to lend her his harp for a few minutes. Such a request, under such circumstances, sufficiently revealed her motive. Beaumarchais understood her. Responding to her wishes, he said : 'I never lend my harp, but if she would care to join us, I could have the pleasure of hearing her and she could hear me play.'

" She came. I was a witness of their first interview. As I have already observed, it was difficult to meet Beaumarchais without loving him. What an impression he was bound to make, with all Paris resounding with his praise and regarding him as at once the defender of the liberty of the people and their avenger for the wrongs under which

they had suffered! It was still more difficult to resist the charm of the eyes, the voice, the bearing, the conversation of this young lady; and this attraction which the one and the other exerted on all who met them was confirmed and strengthened the better one knew them. From that moment their hearts were united by a tie nothing could break, and which love, esteem, confidence, time and the law rendered indissoluble."

This accomplished and enterprising young lady was Marie Thérèse Amélie Willermaula, known in society as Mlle. de Villiers. Her father was a Swiss of good family, who had settled in Lille, where, at twenty-six years of age, he had married Marie Thérèse Werquin. Willermaula occupied a confidential position in the service of the Marquis de Dreux-Brézé, Grand Master of the Ceremonies to Louis XV., and it was in the mansion of that nobleman that the future Mme. de Beaumarchais was born on the 14th November, 1751. Her mother died at twenty-four years of age in 1756, and her father a year later at thirty-one.

At the time of her first acquaintance with Beaumarchais Mlle. Willermaula was twenty-three years old. Rather above the middle height, with a lithe and well-poised figure, all who met her were at once struck by the dignity and even self-assurance of her bearing—an impression soon tempered, however, by the good-natured mockery seldom absent from the lively blue eyes beneath her finely arched brows. She had a wealth of auburn hair, a radiant complexion, and an adorable mouth—if we are to believe the testimony of those who knew her, such as Gudin, Gentil Bernard, Dr. Melchior Mieg of Neuchâtel (familiarly known in her letters as "Frédéric," whose affection she reciprocated after the death of her "bon Pierre"), and many other more or less demonstrative admirers. Her correspondence further reveals the fact that she was always frankly proud of the beauty of her throat and the shapeliness of her form.

In spite of the promptitude of her capitulation to Beaumarchais, she was actually of a rather reserved nature, and slow to make friends; upright and amenable at heart, loyal, affectionate, and indulgent towards the weaknesses of others. She was a man's woman, and with



Sophie Arnould.

From an engraving by Bourgeois de la Richardière, after the painting by Latour.



The Third Mme. de Beaumarchais.

From a miniature.

the notable exception of Mme. Dujard (a translator of "Sappho"), the devoted friend of her widowhood, she did not, as a rule, get on well with other women. "Nature," she says in a self-portrait, "has endowed me with a courage, a strength, a gaiety of character, and a sort of instinctive everyday philosophy, which suffices for all my needs and finds me prepared for all those events which come to spoil the present and the future." In society she was gay, witty and sceptical, but, though she was clever enough to conceal the fact, she confesses to having had little sympathy with the excessive freedom of thought and speech characteristic of many of her husband's guests. She realized, as Beaumarchais never did, the bad form of this sort of talk. Besides, if there is one kind of bore more insufferable than the religious bore, it is surely the aggressively irreligious variety.

For the rest, the opinions of those around her had very little influence upon her. She never had the least hesitation in saying exactly what she thought, and sharply rebuked her "good Pierre," on at least one occasion when his natural petulance betrayed him into contributing a foolish and blasphemous letter to the *Journal de Paris*,—even the cleverest people have their moments of stupidity.

With all her good qualities, no woman was ever more conscious of her own shortcomings, though she was spared the crowning misfortune of diffidence, so commonly the lot of those with the faculty of seeing themselves as others see them. She gaily confessed to employing cosmetics' artful aid to heighten her charms, and she never succeeded in curing herself of a weakness for snuff.* Extremely unmethodical, she hated every interference with her liberty, from whatever cause. Her temper was easily aroused, and to lose control of it, as she admits she sometimes did, was one of the bitterest humiliations of her life. Like all people of a lively temperament, she was subject to fits of deep depression, and was inclined to hypochondria; yet she never failed to meet every danger and difficulty, in a life full of vicissitudes, with the most amazing courage and resourcefulness.

Her judgment in literature and the arts was sound,

* See correspondence with Mme. Dujard quoted in Louis Bonneville de Marsangy. *Madame de Beaumarchais*.

she was an accomplished musician, and a brilliant conversationalist, whilst her letters provide a shrewd and idiomatic commentary on the events of her time and show critical acumen, much worldly wisdom, and literary ability of no mean order.

Mlle. Willermaula soon convinced Beaumarchais that he could not hope to find a more agreeable companion to share his life. They were not married, however, until the 8th March, 1786, Beaumarchais being fifty-four and his wife thirty-five, although she was always genuinely under the impression that she was two years younger than was actually the case. In a letter to her, dated the 24th August of the same year, her husband says: "This marriage was the most serious and deliberate act of my life." Seeing that they had been lovers for twelve years and their daughter Eugénie had supervened, it must be conceded that in his second adjective he had found the exact word. It is only fair to add, however, that Beaumarchais could be relieved of the consequences of the sentence depriving him of civil rights (*including that of marriage*) only by the prompt reversal of the judgment against him, or by the personal intervention of the King. This may very well have been the actual reason for the procrastination in regularizing his union with Mlle. Willermaula. If this fact had occurred to his apologists, they would not, perhaps, have made such a mystery of the circumstances attending the third marriage of Beaumarchais, and the birth of his daughter Eugénie.

CHAPTER XVI

ON SECRET SERVICE

ALTHOUGH Louis XV. had been not a little amused by the Beaumarchais pamphlets, he was much irritated by the public clamour which had arisen out of the case, and strictly charged the Lieutenant of Police, M. de Sartine, to see that for the future no more was heard of this irrepressible litigant. But, luckily for Beaumarchais, the King had been greatly impressed by the ability he had displayed in the conduct of the lawsuit. It so happened, that at this moment—the first of many odd coincidences in this bewildering drama—Théveneau de Morande, the head of a notorious gang of professional blackmailers, from his safe retreat in London, threatened the quasi-domesticity of Mme. Du Barry with the publication of a work, bearing the fetching title of *Mémoires d'une Femme Publique*, which purported to be a veracious account of the errors of her youth. The author had contrived to bring a copy of his book under the personal notice of his intended victim, as a delicate hint that she might possibly think it expedient to persuade His Most Christian Majesty to pay for the suppression of the whole edition. When the favourite consulted him on the matter, Louis thought the simpler course would be to obtain an extradition warrant from the English Government against the libeller, and, when they had him in their power, commit him to a Castle of Oblivion—to use Montesquieu's phrase—for the rest of his days. His Britannic Majesty's Government, however, proved too squeamish to accede to this request, but promised not to oppose the arrest of the blackmailer if it could be carried out secretly and neatly by the French police. But Morande was on the alert, and immediately stirred up the English Press in his favour by coolly repre-

senting himself as a harmless political refugee who was being persecuted by the minions of an oppressor of liberty. That was more than enough, and the officers sent to kidnap him narrowly escaped being pitched into the Thames by a furious mob which had flown to the aid of the outlaw.

Having won this preliminary encounter, Morande caused it to be known in the French court that three thousand copies of his book were in print and ready for distribution among the French, English, German and Dutch booksellers.

Now thoroughly alarmed, the King commissioned the Comte de Lauraguais, and other persons of some note, to proceed to London and enter into negotiations with Morande with a view of frustrating the threatened blow. But all their efforts proved unsuccessful. At this juncture, Louis suddenly remembered some words said to him by La Borde, the court banker, in commendation of Beaumarchais, with whom he was on terms of intimacy. "Your friend," said the King, when La Borde was summoned to his presence, "is reputed to have great talent as a negotiator : if he could carry out secretly and successfully a matter in which I am interested, his own affair might be settled according to his wishes."

La Borde at once explained the situation to Beaumarchais, and indicated the nature of the service required of him as the price of his rehabilitation. Beaumarchais promptly undertook the mission ; indeed, he asked for nothing better. But the difficulty was how to get away without arousing suspicion, for it was obviously of the utmost importance it should not become known that the King was employing in a confidential capacity a man whom the law had just branded as a felon. Beaumarchais had no sooner determined on his plan, than persistent rumours began to circulate in Paris that the popular hero was being subjected to fresh persecutions, and was threatened, at almost any moment, with arrest. Immediately after came the news of his flight.

This was contrived by the Prince de Conti and the Prince de Ligne, to whom he had recourse in his well-simulated terror. Both these noblemen were at the time completely duped, though the latter recovered his perspicacity soon after the event. As for the faithful



From a lithograph by Delpech, after a drawing by Belliard of a portrait at Versailles.

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Gudin, to the end of his life he never suspected the hoax. The Prince de Ligne, later, gave his version of his share in this transaction as follows :

"I was requested by M. le Prince de Conti to meet Beaumarchais under an extinguished street-lamp at the corner of the Rue Colbert, and conduct him in a hackney-coach as far as Bourget, whence I sent him in one of my own carriages to my agent in Ghent, who facilitated his crossing to England. This extraordinary man pretended that without our help he would be arrested : and yet eight days later he was back in the private apartments of Louis XV., who had sent him on a secret mission, and by this ruse he put us off the scent ! "*

When Figaro, a few years later, was to declare in his free-and-easy way that "intrigue and politics are near relations," it is clear that his creator knew what he was talking about !

For the purposes of his mission Beaumarchais concealed his identity under an anagram on his original surname, and passed as the Chevalier de Ronac. On reaching London, he sought out the Comte de Lauraguais, and the pair at once called upon Morande. After much haggling, Beaumarchais finally agreed to recommend the King to accept the blackmailer's terms, namely, 20,000 livres (say £800) down and a pension of 4,000 livres (say £160) a year, so long as he kept his tongue and, above all, his pen in order. Thus, within eight days of leaving Paris, Beaumarchais, as we have seen, was back at Versailles to report substantial progress. Upon hearing the suggested terms, Louis jibbed but eventually compromised for a single payment of 32,000 livres (say £1,200) for the complete destruction of all copies of the accursed thing. Beaumarchais rushed off to England again with the revised terms, which he had undertaken to get the blackmailer to accept. On rejoining Morande, Beaumarchais says he gave him a little fatherly advice, and then, by an adroit combination of threats if he persisted in his criminal courses, and promises of generous treatment if he turned over a new leaf, persuaded him not only to accept the proffered terms and to burn the whole edition of the work in his presence, but enlisted him, there and then, into the

* See *Œuvres choisies du Prince de Ligne*, 1809, T. II., p. 340.

secret service of his country; thereby, as he quaintly expresses it in his *Mémoire au Roi*, "converting a skilful poacher into an excellent gamekeeper."

With almost unparalleled impudence, Morande's *Gazetier Cuirassé* informs us in a note, dated 3rd May, 1774, that the holocaust took place on the 27th April in a brick-kiln in the Parish of St. Pancras, and that the writer (Morande himself) had seen "with his own eyes" the sum of 32,000 livres paid in conclusion of the transaction.

Well pleased with the unqualified success of his mission, Beaumarchais hurried home to receive the promised reward for his services. But what was his dismay to find that Louis was dangerously ill—and, when this singularly inopportune malady was quickly followed by the monarch's still more untimely death, the unfortunate Beaumarchais saw all his hope dashed at one blow to the ground, and his longed-for rehabilitation farther off than ever; for the austere young King would, he feared, set an extremely modest estimate upon services rendered in the interest of such a reputation as that enjoyed by Mme. Du Barry. His apprehension proved only too well founded. Louis XVI. intimated that he proposed entirely to ignore his claim.

"The singularity of my fate," he wrote when still staggering under this blow, "fills me with wonder. If only the King had preserved his health for eight days longer, I should have been restored to the position which had been wickedly snatched from me. I had his royal word for it."

There was nothing to be done but to start all over again. He lost no time in offering his services to the new King. But both Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette had been most disagreeably impressed by his conduct in the Goëzman case. On hearing of the judgment the new monarch had been heard to say: "A good thing too!"—adding a few still more uncomplimentary remarks!* Whilst Weber, in his *Mémoires concernant Marie Antoinette*,† reports that at the time of the lawsuit, the young Queen, in allusion to Beaumarchais, made the significant observation to the Princesse de Tarente: "The man whose malice makes

* See *Mémoires secrets*, Vol. XXVII., p. 240.

† See Weber (J.), *Mémoires concernant Marie Antoinette*, Vol. I. Notes, p.xxii.



From an engraving by Danguin, after a portrait by Mme. Vigée Lebrun.

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people laugh is not necessarily wicked, but the man whose deliberate aim is to make others weep is really wicked. I have read enough of Beaumarchais, and never wish to read him again." It is a humiliating trait of human nature to find something not altogether displeasing in the minor misfortunes of our neighbours, and we may be sure that the disparaging words spoken by the King and Queen were not long in reaching the ears of Beaumarchais. He promptly composed a witty song, addressed to Marie Antoinette, entitled *Repentance*, which the Vicomtesse de Castellane undertook to present to her royal mistress, who, however, remained firm and refused to look at it.

Under these circumstances, he could be under no illusions as to the fear and dislike he had inspired in the new sovereigns. Nevertheless, his case was so desperate, that when his overtures were peremptorily declined, he instantly set about devising some means of making himself useful in the hope of receiving from Louis XVI. what death had prevented him from obtaining at the hands of his grandfather.

In the scramble for office, which then marked the beginning of a new reign, M. de Sartine was threatened with the loss of his post. Beaumarchais, ever on the alert, was one of the first to get wind of this intrigue, and at once seized on it to further his designs. He gave the anxious Lieutenant of Police to understand that if ever he wanted him he was always at his disposal.

Six weeks after the accession of Louis XVI. to the throne, M. de Sartine reported that he had received information respecting the preparation in London of a fresh libellous publication, this time directed against the Queen. It was one of several defamatory pamphlets in a list supplied by Morande, and was entitled: "*Dissertation extraite d'un plus grand ouvrage ou Avis important à la branche espagnol sur ses droits à la couronne de France à défaut d'héritiers, et qui peut être mesme très utile à toute la famille de Bourbon, surtout au roi Louis Seize, G. A. à Paris*, 1774." He stated that the work was of the most infamous character and that it was necessary at all costs to get it destroyed. It was written, he said, by an Italian Jew, oddly named Guillaume Angelucci, who in England was known as William Hatkinson (*sic*). The blackmailer's plans were

completed for the issue of two editions in London and Amsterdam respectively. M. de Sartine sought the King's sanction for the employment of Beaumarchais, as the only man capable of repelling the attack.

After some demur, and with the utmost reluctance, Louis agreed to the proposal, and Beaumarchais, hurrying his preparations, was able to fix his departure for the 26th June. But having been once disappointed, he was not satisfied with a mere verbal commission. To ensure the success of his mission he must have a written acknowledgment, signed and sealed, of his appointment as the accredited agent of the King, and, in order that there might be no mistake, he himself submitted a draft of the phrasing he desired, even down to the words: "Signé: Louis." Without this precaution, he said, it was very doubtful whether his enterprise could be successful; and his failure, as he was careful to point out to M. de Sartine, might have very disagreeable results for the Lieutenant of Police: "In that case," he wrote, "you may expect to see your credit weakened, to be quickly followed by your fall . . . and I—well, I shall become just what it pleases the fate which appears to dog my steps."

At first Louis flatly declined to give the written acknowledgment, but in the end, the importunate emissary carried his point, and the King signed the commission as originally suggested by his agent, and caused it to be forwarded to him in London. Beaumarchais immediately had the document encased in a gold frame, and suspended it round his neck by a chain of the same metal, not forgetting to inform Louis that he intended to wear it over his heart and would part with it only with life itself!

From the moment he reached London all we know of his movements is contained in an amazing recital of the episode in two letters addressed to his friends Roudil and Gudin respectively, and a report addressed to the King, dated 15 October, 1774, upon his return to France, with such side-lights as will appear later.

Adventures are to the imaginative; and Beaumarchais, as we know, had an extraordinary faculty for investing every incident of his career with the glamour of romantic drama. But although we all like to believe the most entertaining story best, there are limits to the credulity

of even the most complacent reader, which no writer can afford to ignore.

A traveller in an unknown country may have to accept as his guide a man who presents dubious credentials, but he will follow him with a watchful eye to his bearings, and a suspicious mind for the incidents of the journey. Beaumarchais has only himself to blame if his evasions and prevarications compel us rigorously to scrutinize the vainglorious and, in some respects, incredible narrative which he has seen fit to give out as a veracious account of his adventures on secret service.

CHAPTER XVII

BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE BRIGANDS OF THE LEICHTENHOLTZ

MORE fortunate than anyone else had been, Beaumarchais experienced no difficulty in getting into touch with the elusive Hebrew of the incongruous names, and in an autograph letter (brought to light by M. Lintilhac) addressed to the King under cover to M. de Sartine, he is able to report :

"This Sunday, July, 1774.

"I have seen the MS.: I have read it, and have even been able to make an abstract of it. . . . This advantage was obtained by offering fifty guineas to have it clandestinely conveyed to me for a few hours. I thought it expedient to begin in this way, for the work might have been merely a spiteful ineptitude not worth troubling about. In that case I should have come back at once.

"The MS. was brought to me secretly at Vauxhall Gardens last night, on condition that I returned it by five o'clock in the morning : an intrigue I set going among valets which served me rather well. Returning to my lodging, I read it, made a summary of it, and about four o'clock in the morning, upon a pre-arranged signal, I opened the window of my parlour looking out on to the Marylebone Road, and threw the packet to the man who had delivered it to me." Appended to this report is a detailed analysis of the pamphlet.

Having thus assured himself of the gravity of the threat to the young Queen, he interviewed Guillaume Angelucci (*alias* William Hatkinson) and soon won him over as he had done Morande, and, within a few days of his reaching London, the payment of a sum of £1,400 procured him the

pleasure of superintending the burning of the English edition of the offensive brochure. With his English valet (who, it will be useful to remember, knew German), he next accompanied the Jew to Amsterdam in order to destroy the Dutch edition. This good work being satisfactorily accomplished, Beaumarchais dismissed Angelucci-Hatkinson with the fruits of his industry, and took the opportunity of making a tour of the art galleries and libraries of Amsterdam by way of relaxation.

But "this accursed Israelite" had tricked him by surreptitiously holding back one copy of the pamphlet, with which he fled to Nuremberg, where, it was said, he intended to print editions in French and Italian.

"I am like a raging lion," wrote Beaumarchais to M. de Sartine. "I have no money, but I have diamonds and jewellery: I shall sell all that I have and, with fury in my heart, take to post-chaising again. . . . I do not know German, I have no idea of my way, but I have got a good map, from which I see I am going to Nimwegen, Cleves, Dusseldorf, Cologne, Frankfort, Mayence, and lastly to Nuremberg. I shall travel night and day, if I do not fall with fatigue by the way. Curses on the abominable wretch who makes me journey another three or four hundred leagues after everything was settled, and I hoped to have earned a rest! If I overtake him I shall strip him of his papers and kill him for all the trouble and anxiety he has caused me."

Immediately after writing these words the father of Figaro dashed off in pursuit of the son of Israel. Fortunately, he knew not only the route his quarry had taken, but the town he was making for and his intentions when he got there. How he came by this knowledge he does not explain: to do so might have taken him a long time, and he was in a great hurry.

At the entrance of a small wood a few miles from Neustadt, according to one statement of Beaumarchais, he saw a little man, mounted on a pony trotting along the highway ahead of him. We thought as much: it was Angelucci, who turning at that moment, and recognizing his pursuer, made off into the heart of the wood. Springing from his carriage, with a pistol in his hand, Beaumarchais rushed after him. As the pony penetrated further into the

forest the Jew was forced to slacken his pace, and Beaumarchais overtaking him, seized him by the heel of his boot, pulled him from the saddle, and compelled him to ransack his valise and produce the famous pamphlet. Thinking his last hour had come, Angelucci pleaded so hard for his life that Beaumarchais not only spared him, but restored to him a portion of the money he had previously given him, and let him go free. He then retraced his steps towards the carriage; but he had scarcely dismissed Angelucci when he was attacked by two bandits, one of whom, armed with a long knife, demanded his purse or his life. Beaumarchais immediately fired, but his pistol failed to go off. Meanwhile the other ruffian had stolen up behind him, and knocked him down, whilst the man with the knife darted in and stabbed at his chest. Happily, the blade, deflected by the gold-case containing the royal commission, slid upwards, only slightly wounding his neck and deeply cutting his chin. Struggling to his feet, he snatched the knife from his first assailant (badly wounding his hand in doing so), and succeeded in throwing him to the earth, and then partly bound him with a view of bringing him to justice. But the other, who had at first fled, now returned with reinforcements and it might have gone ill with Beaumarchais had it not been for the timely arrival of his lackey and an equally opportune blast of his postilion's horn which put the brigands to flight.

That, in brief, is one story, and if we do not like it, Beaumarchais offers us another—two or three more, in fact. To Conrad Grüber, landlord of the Red Cock Inn at Nuremberg, he told the tale embodied in the official report as forwarded to Headquarters by Chief Postal Superintendent Fezer. This interesting document is as follows:

"Nuremberg, 18 August, 1774.

"At nine o'clock in the morning, I was called to the Red Cock Inn, and learned that a French gentleman, named de Rohnac (*sic*), had arrived there last night, and in the presence of the Baron von Nietsche, an officer of the Royal Poland Regiment, lodging there, and the host of the said Inn, Conrad Grüber, showed two recent wounds, one in the left hand and the other in the chin, as also blood-stains on his clothes, stating that yesterday in broad

daylight, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, he was attacked by highway robbers about a league before reaching Neustadt, under the following circumstances:

"Getting down from his carriage near a fir wood, he told his servant to drive on slowly and himself advanced a short distance into the wood, when he saw coming towards him a man on horseback followed by another on foot. The first threw himself upon him and dealt him a deadly blow in the chest with a long knife, which, deflected by an order or portrait he carried suspended round his neck by a gold chain, merely wounded his chin and bruised his chest, and thus gave him an opportunity of snatching the weapon away with his left hand, cutting his fingers to the bone in doing so. During the struggle, the man on foot, coming from behind, tried to seize him, but he had the good fortune to master and throw him to the ground, at the same time drawing his pocket pistol, which had already put the horseman to flight. The man on foot threw himself on his knees begging for mercy; the horseman in his flight had lost his hat and wig, which permitted M. Rohnac to see that he had black hair.

"As his carriage was still some distance away, and he thought he saw several more people in the wood, he had, whilst thanking God for saving him, set this second assailant free and regained his carriage with all speed. These two ruffians, he thought, had every appearance of being Jews, and he has, he says, described them to the life in the following written statement:

"'In a fir-wood about a league before reaching Neustadt, M. de Ronac was attacked by two men, one of whom, armed with a hilted knife, is about 5ft. 2in. in height, of slight build, with a long, lean face, aquiline nose, and big, black, forbidding eyes, and a very yellow complexion. He has black hair under a round, blond wig. He wears a blue riding-coat of English make, with brass buttons, a red waistcoat, leather breeches and top-boots: he looks like a Jew. His companion called him 'Angelucci.' He rides a brown-bay pony, with a white mark down the entire front of its head. The second is tall, wearing a grey vest, without sleeves, and carrying a blue coat over his arm, and a big hat without brim. He has rather a white complexion, fair hair and round face. His

companion, on seeing him thrown to the ground by M. de Ronac, called him 'Hatkinson.'"

Fezer added that he begged M. de Ronac to accompany him to his head office to make his deposition in person, but he excused himself on account of the urgency of his business in Vienna, asking that all further inquiries or information might be addressed to him at the Poste Restante, Vienna. In spite of his hurry to get away, however, Beaumarchais was obliged to appear before the Burgomaster and repeat his deposition before that worthy, who in his turn forwarded his report on the matter to Headquarters. As this statement is a repetition in brief of the Postal Superintendent's evidence, we will only quote the exordium which is too good to miss. With an impudence worthy of Figaro himself, M. de Ronac suggests that "the authorities should keep a sharp watch at all the gates of the town in order that these men may, if possible, be arrested, in which case Her Imperial Majesty should be immediately informed, for the Empress would take the keenest interest in this news."

The foregoing documents are sufficiently damaging to the credibility of the royal emissary's narrative. But worse is to come. On his arrival at Nuremberg we might think he would take his postilion's advice to rest for a few days and have his wounds properly dressed. Not at all. He must press forward to Ratisbon with the least possible delay. He had no sooner dismissed the postilion at Emskirchen, however, than he became aware of the fact that the jolting of a post-chaise caused him a great deal of pain, in fact he could scarcely breathe because of the oppression in his chest which had suddenly grown intolerable; so as soon as he struck the Danube, he decided to continue his journey by boat. This course had the advantage of withdrawing him from the indiscreet inquiries of officialdom. Besides, he had told the story so often that sooner or later some unconsidered trifle was bound to trip him up. On the voyage, he beguiled the time by writing the letters to Roudil and Gudin already referred to, exhorting them to read selected passages to all his friends "male and female." He reached Vienna without further mishap.

Meanwhile, the honest postilion, on his way home to

Langenfeld, was very much exercised in his mind over the strange behaviour of his late fare, both before and after the alleged attack by brigands. The more he thought about it, the less he liked it. He really did not know what to make of it. On reaching Neustadt, therefore, he sought out the authorities, and made the following declaration :

"Received at Neustadt on the Aisch,
"14th August, 1774.
at about 6 o'clock in the evening.

"Appearing before the Officer of the Bailiwick, the postilion attached to the station of Langenfeld, immediately upon his return from Emskirchen.

"JOHANN GEORG DRATZ.

"Who states that,

"This afternoon he drove to Emskirchen a traveller, whose name he does not know, but who might have been seen passing here at about 4 o'clock. He was an Englishman, knowing no German, driving in a private two-wheeled carriage, accompanied by a servant who understands German. He is not sure whether this gentleman is in his right senses, nor what is the matter with him, but he thinks it his duty to relate what happened to him with this traveller.

"On the other side of Diebach (a hamlet between Langenfeld and Neustadt), deponent, on turning round, noticed the stranger stand up and take from his trunk what looked like a toilet set and draw out a mirror and a razor. He thought it strange that the gentleman should wish to shave whilst the chaise was in motion.

"After passing Diebach, when entering the wood called Leichtenholtz the traveller, ordering him to stop, got down and walked towards the middle of the wood, carrying a Spanish cane in his hand, and telling his servant to order him to drive on slowly. . . . He could not understand why the gentleman should want to go into the heart of the wood unless it was to amuse himself by shooting, but then he took no firearm with him.

"The deponent wished soon to stop, but was told by the

servant to go on, which he did very slowly as far as the extreme limit of the Leichtenholtz, and the traveller not returning they waited there for about half-an-hour. At this moment there passed across the highway from the wood, three carpenter's mates, coming home from work, with their axes over their shoulders and their tool-bags on their backs, and soon afterwards the gentleman emerged from among the trees with his hand wrapped in a white handkerchief. He told his servant, and the latter repeated it to witness in German, that he had seen some bandits . . . but the deponent replied to the servant that perhaps his master had seen the carpenter's mates and had mistaken them for bandits. The traveller, thereupon, resumed his place in the carriage and ordered him to proceed.

"Whilst traversing the town, a little above the hospital, the gentleman lowered the window of the carriage and, through the opening, the deponent noticed that the handkerchief enveloping the traveller's hand was stained with blood and that there was also a little blood on the left side of his neck and on his cravat, and having asked him what it was, he replied that he had been fired on. The deponent, thereupon, wished to report here in order that the gentleman might make his deposition, but he would not hear of it, ordering him to push on to Emskirchen. On reaching this town, the traveller repeated to the Post-Master that he had been attacked by brigands, but did not wish to show his wounds or make a formal declaration ; on the contrary, he set out with all speed for Nuremberg.

"He thinks that the gentleman must have wounded himself with the razor which he had taken with him into the wood, and might make trouble at Nuremberg in such a way as to give this route a bad name—especially as the mail was lately held up by robbers near Possenheim—and make it appear that this road is not safe since travellers were attacked in broad daylight. . . .

"The deponent states :

"That neither in nor near the Leichtenholtz did he see any one except the three carpenter's mates, and that he noticed absolutely nothing which could lead him to believe in the presence of malefactors and that he had heard nothing whatever of the alleged shot. As for the

wounds, the gentleman would not let him or the Post-Master at Emskirchen examine them. His hand was enveloped in a handkerchief and, as far as he could see, the wound on his neck was quite an insignificant scratch which did not bleed much. . . ."

The reader is now in full possession of the evidence on both sides. The discussion of this subject has revealed among contemporary and modern French and German writers an extraordinary diversity of opinion, from the artless credulity of Gudin and the slightly hesitating confidence of de Loménie to the open mistrust of Bettelheim and Huot; whilst M. Lintilhac, the most painstaking and thorough of modern apologists, unable to ignore the researches of the censors, airily dismisses the escapade as a harmless practical joke in rather bad taste, but clings to the authenticity of the comic opera Jew.

It is good for a biographer to be in complete sympathy with his subject, but it is also good for him to be on the alert against the cajolery of such a plausible hero as Beaumarchais often proved himself to be. For our part, we think Angelucci-Hatkinson was the creature of an exuberant and undisciplined imagination, and that Beaumarchais, in spite of his cleverness, would have found it more difficult to refute the muddle-headed honesty of postilion Dratz than to confound all the malignant cunning of Marin and his associates put together. Fortunately for him, he was not called upon to try, since he never knew of the existence of this testimony against him. Had he suspected that his antics in Germany and Austria would ever be subjected to so close a scrutiny, he might have taken more trouble to make it possible for us to believe him.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

M. DE RONAC had no sooner reached Vienna than he made his presence in the capital known to the Empress Maria Teresa in a letter couched in the following terms :

"MADAME,

"I beg Your Majesty to believe that I offer the highest proof of my respect even in failing to observe the prescribed method of approaching the royal presence only through the intermediary of the great.

"I have hurried night and day from the confines of Western Europe to communicate to Your Majesty certain matters affecting your happiness and peace of mind, which, I venture to say, will move you to the depths of your heart.

"MADAME,

"Your Majesty will understand the importance of the secret by the very irregularity of the step I am taking, but Your Majesty will understand even better how urgent it is not to lose a moment in hearing me, if I say that though I have been cruelly assailed and desperately wounded by brigands near Nuremberg, I have not delayed a moment, in spite of my terrible sufferings, and that I reached Vienna by way of the Danube only because the excruciating pain of my wounds made it impossible for me to support the jolting of my carriage.

"If Your Majesty should think this letter from an unknown person attributable to the feverish delirium of a wounded man, I beg her, more in her own interest than in mine, graciously to send a person of confidence to me

with the least possible delay. I will not divulge my business to him, for this I can do to Your Majesty alone, but I will tell him enough to enable me to obtain from Your Majesty a private and secret audience of which neither your ministers nor our ambassador must have any knowledge whatever.

"I beg Your Majesty not to take it ill if I dare ask her to give the person she deigns to send, a note signed by herself in such terms as these: 'M. de Ronac may explain himself fully to the person who delivers this letter. He has the honour of being in my confidence.'

"This precaution is necessary in order that I may be assured that my letter has fallen into no other hands than those of Your Imperial Majesty. Whilst awaiting your orders at 'The Three Runners,' Saint Michael's Place, near the Palace, Vienna, I am, with the most respectful devotion, Madame,

"Your Imperial Majesty's
"Most humble and most obedient Servant,
"DE RONAC.

"Vienna. This 20th August, 1774."

So, on his own confession, he had "hurried night and day from the confines of Western Europe," not to arrest the defaulting Israelite, but to make a communication to the Empress, affecting the honour of her daughter, Queen Marie Antoinette. This fact, in conjunction with the care he had taken when in London to engage a lackey who understood German, and, above all, his persistence in demanding from Louis XVI. a personal, written commission (which could be of no use to him in the negotiations for the suppression of the libel, but was an essential guarantee of his status in a foreign Court), serves only to strengthen the suspicion that he had, from the very first, planned to make this journey to Austria—Jew or no Jew, brigands or no brigands—in the hope of obtaining a secret interview with the Empress Maria Teresa, solely with a view to securing her testimony as to the transcendent services he had performed on behalf of her daughter.

The Empress at once guessing that the stranger's business concerned Marie Antoinette, requested the Count

von Seilern to find out what the writer wanted. Maria Teresa having provided the Count with the stipulated autograph letter, he immediately sent for Beaumarchais. But the latter, seeing that his bait was taking, excused himself from at once answering the summons on account of illness " caused through spitting blood, from which he had suffered severely ever since his misfortune in the wood near Nuremberg." It will be noted that he had changed the nature of his malady. This was rendered necessary by the fact that his cuts had healed more rapidly than he had anticipated, and he now looked less like the dashing hero of an encounter with brigands than the pitiful exemplar of astonishingly incompetent shaving. Two hours later, however, M. de Ronac had the honour of offering in person his respectful homage to His Excellency the Governor of Lower Austria.

The Count listened attentively whilst the interesting Frenchman told his tale in the vivid narrative style of which he was such a master. He spared no detail, from the moment when his royal master honoured him with a confidential mission to England and Holland, which (as luck would have it) also necessitated his journey to Vienna, to the almost fatal dagger-thrust and his miraculous delivery from the hands of the cut-throats of the Leichtenholtz. But at this point he stopped abruptly. He was not at liberty to say more : the rest of his story could be related only to the Empress in person and alone, for it concerned Her Majesty the Queen of France. Time pressed, and he requested an immediate interview with the Empress, reinforcing his demand by allowing Seilern to glance at the precious royal commission in its gold case, still twisted and damaged by the assassin's knife. By his own avowal he had hitherto made no use of the royal authority, and this was also the first occasion on which he had revealed his identity.

The pair now proceeded to the palace at Schönbrunn, the Count to present his report, and M. de Ronac to be at hand if wanted. The latter was almost immediately admitted to the royal presence. The Empress received him very graciously, and for three and a half hours listened to the animated narrative of the adventures and sufferings of this intrepid champion of her daughter's fair name.

M. de Ronac, at Maria Teresa's request, then read the unique example of the shameful monograph which, as he was careful to tell her, he had procured at the peril of his life, and earnestly besought her to secure the arrest of the horrid Jew, who was the cause of all the mischief and had now, he had reason to believe, fled to Venice, his native town.

On the completion of the reading, the Empress expressed a wish to retain the document in order to consider her best course of action—a desire which, under the circumstances, Beaumarchais was no doubt right in interpreting as a command. On the termination of the interview, therefore, he left the brochure with her, and appears never to have seen it again.

Maria Teresa's opinion of the libel is preserved for us in a letter addressed to Mercy-Argenteau, her ambassador at the Court of France, immediately after the interview with Beaumarchais. This communication, which appears to have escaped other writers on this subject, most of whom express their doubt that the Empress ever saw the pamphlet in its entirety, if at all, is in the following terms :

" Nothing more atrocious has ever been published : it fills my heart with the utmost contempt for this nation, devoid alike of religion, morals and feelings."

Her intemperate language will perhaps be thought pardonable in a mother when we explain the nature of the treatise. The cardinal point of the writer's argument was that Marie Antoinette, being convinced from her intimate knowledge of the King's abnormal temperament that he would never have children, was nevertheless animated by a keen desire to keep the throne in the event of his death. To this end, boldly asserted the pamphleteer, " this ambitious and pleasure-loving woman will flinch from nothing." He, therefore, urged all claimants to the succession of the French throne, and especially Louis XVI. himself, " to beware of the resolute and abominable stratagems of the Austrian woman. . . . Remember whose daughter she is, and that in the absence of other counsellors the latter (Maria Teresa) will be her ablest accomplice in such machinations."

Now, it is our conviction that Maria Teresa had

instantly made up her mind that the treatise which the enigmatical Frenchman had read was a unique copy, and, having deliberately bluffed him into giving it up to her, had no intention whatever of relinquishing it. Beaumarchais, we think, had failed to foresee that the Empress would want to keep it, and he thus found himself deprived of the only tangible proof he could bring to M. de Sartine of the successful accomplishment of his mission. Nor, under the circumstances, could he formally ask for its return.

When, at last, he realized this, he wrote a long letter to the Empress, expressing great repugnance to submitting the pamphlet in its entirety to so young and inexperienced a man as Louis XVI., and urged her to place facilities in his way to print a single copy, which he himself undertook to expurgate of all malevolent insinuations against the young Queen. On the firm refusal of Maria Teresa to entertain such a suggestion, Beaumarchais returned again and again to the charge in letter after letter to the Count von Seilern.

This persistence in asking to be allowed to falsify the document, we consider to have been merely a ruse to obtain a copy to replace the one he had lost, but it forms the principal evidence of Messrs. Huot, Fournier and others, for accusing Beaumarchais himself of the authorship of the libel, and these writers are of the opinion that in reading it to the Empress he was frightened at the import of the charges he had brought against Marie Antoinette, and hoped by this means to secure an opportunity of destroying the original and substituting the expurgated copy. It is but fair to add that von Arneth, who claims to be the only modern author who had examined the treatise in detail, hesitatingly acquits Beaumarchais of this charge on the ground of insufficient evidence.

The Imperial Chancellor, Prince von Kaunitz, into whose hands the affair now passed, had no such irresolution. This astute diplomat had been in Paris at the time of the Goëzman trial, and knew the man with whom he had to deal. Having received Seilern's account of the interview with the Empress, carefully examined the evidence of postilion Dratz and Chief Superintendent Fezer, and having failed, after the most exhaustive

inquiries, to discover anybody who had seen either the wandering Jew or the elusive brigands, he quickly decided that the Frenchman was an impostor, and had shamefully duped his Imperial Mistress. The result was that M. de Ronac had scarcely reached his lodgings, after what he considered a second most satisfactory interview with the Empress, who had elated him by expressing some concern for his health, than Seilern's secretary presented himself, accompanied by two officers and eight grenadiers with fixed bayonets, intimating that until further orders he must consider himself a prisoner of state. His valise with all his papers and the famous gold case containing the King's autograph, were all taken from him, and sealed in his presence.

With some dignity Beaumarchais protested vigorously against this outrage on the person of a royal messenger which, he asserted, might have very disagreeable consequences to those responsible for it. But all his heroics were in vain. He was kept a close prisoner for thirty-one days. Indeed, we can scarcely doubt that his sagacity in obtaining the signature of Louis to his commission alone saved him from spending the remainder of his days in an Austrian prison.

Meanwhile, the undoubted authenticity of the King's mandate moved Kaunitz to write immediately to de Sartine to inquire what should be done with his prisoner. After some delay the Lieutenant of Police, deeming it imprudent to disavow his agent, put the best face on a difficult situation by acknowledging that Beaumarchais was his man, defended his mysterious actions, and requested that he might be at once released and allowed to return to Paris.

Thereupon, Kaunitz gracefully took upon himself all responsibility for the unfortunate misunderstanding, though it is perfectly clear that he firmly adhered to the original opinion he had formed of this amazing adventure.

"It seems to me in this business," he wrote to Mercy-Argenteau, on the 20th September, "that apart from his notorious moral laxity, M. de Sartine may have some personal interest in wishing to evade the well-founded reproaches which might be made against him for recommending to the King such a person as M. de Beaumarchais for so delicate a mission, and that this may well be the

principal reason which induced him, not only to acknowledge this man, but even to undertake his defence."

For the rest, he had no hesitation whatever in attributing the calumny to Beaumarchais himself, for," Supposing," he wrote further to Mercy-Argenteau, " that Beaumarchais is the author of the libel—as the whole history of his private life and his conduct throughout this affair might well lead us to suspect—all that he claims to have done, as also the real motives of his actions and of the ridiculous romance with which he has regaled us, become as clear as daylight.

" On this supposition, in order to turn suspicion from himself of such a flagrant crime of *lèse-majesté*, what was more natural than that he should himself undertake the mission, or even, perhaps by some indirect means, get himself nominated for it ? . . .

" Having succeeded, he would of course try to turn it to his own advantage and, to this end, being an extremely clever story-teller, he fabricated, if not all, at least a great deal of his adventures, in order to make it appear that he was a man whose energy, astuteness and courage merited the highest reward."

Even the almost impenetrable fog of his style is unable to obscure the lucidity of the Chancellor's reasoning. Assuming, as he says, that Beaumarchais was himself the author, or the accomplice of the writer of the pamphlet, the mystery is explained from beginning to end.

Before speeding his unwilling guest on his way home, Kaunitz suggested that it would be becoming in his Royal Mistress to accord M. de Beaumarchais a solatium of a thousand ducats (about a thousand pounds). This the Frenchman indignantly refused. What did they take him for : an adventurer ? He did not want money ; all he wanted was to be dealt with according to his station, and they had treated him as though he were a foreign criminal —him, the confidential agent of the King and Queen of France ! It was intolerable ! At last Kaunitz somewhat soothed his ruffled feelings by suggesting to the Empress that he might buy a ring with the money, and that Her Imperial Majesty would allow him to wear it as a reward for his distinguished services.

Nor was Kaunitz by any means alone in viewing the

character of Beaumarchais and the narrative of his adventures with profound mistrust. The following lampoon, in a hitherto unpublished MS., is doubtless one of many witty but scurrilous attacks made upon him at this time:

"EPITAPHE DU BARON DE RONAC EN FRANCONNIE.

" Cy-gît qui fut de bonne taille
Qui sçavait danser et chanter,
Faisait des vers vaille qui vaille,
Et les sçavait bien reciter.

" Sa race étant sans antiquaille
Ne pouvait des héros compter,
Pourtant il eût donné Bataille
Si l'on avait voulu tâter.

" Il parlait fort bien de la Guerre
Des Cieux, du Globe, de la Terre,
Du Droit Civil et Droit canon;
Et connaissait assez les choses
Par leurs effets et par leurs causes:
Était-il honnête homme? Ha! Non!"

A note at the foot of this pleasantry explains that "The Baron de Ronac, being attacked by two robbers in the Forest of Nuremberg, killed three of them."

In conclusion, let us briefly recall the situation in which Beaumarchais found himself at the beginning of the new reign. It is well to remember, in judging this episode, that on his accession to the throne Louis was twenty years old whilst Marie Antoinette was nineteen, and with youthful downrightness they had both expressed their irreconcilable hostility to an exceptionally gifted man, who had never done them any harm, and had just rendered to their grandfather a notable service in which many others had failed. Moreover, this man was suffering under what he, and vast numbers of cultured people at home and abroad, considered a flagrant injustice; and, in the face of the sovereign's open ill-will, the victim's whole future was irretrievably ruined. This man was one of the most audacious and original spirits of the century, and was no more overburdened with scruples than most of the men among whom he lived. Desperate cases call for desperate remedies; and we believe that constant brooding over his very real grievances at last betrayed him into resorting to the insidious arts of the blackmailer. In Morande (a very precious scoundrel, whose one good

point, so far as we have been able to discover, was his admirably clear and elegant handwriting), with whom he ever afterwards remained on the most intimate terms, he had a tool ready to his hand. What could be more natural (being the man he was) than that he should make use of the rascal's peculiar talents. We believe he did, and that with the probable connivance of de Sartine himself, they concocted the whole imbroglio between them, perhaps sharing the spoils. Remember that Beaumarchais was the creator of Figaro, the most ingenious intriguer in literature. "A little more running to and fro on other people's affairs," exclaims Frontin, the amusing but rascally valet in *Turcaret*, "a few more worries and troubles, and I shall attain a state of ease and comfort! Then my mind will be at peace, and how happy and contented I shall be! There will be only my conscience to set at rest."

It is but fair to add that Louis and Marie Antoinette appear to have been satisfied with the services of Beaumarchais, for they did not hesitate to employ him again; but their mistrust had been so profound that we are constrained to think that they were afraid of him and hoped by this means to conciliate him. As for M. de Sartine, his enemies had no sooner succeeded in procuring his transfer from the Ministry of Police to the less coveted Ministry of the Navy than he was assailed with honest doubts, which he confided to Mercy-Argentau who, in his turn, communicated the conversation to Maria Teresa:

"He admitted to me," wrote the Austrian Ambassador, "that he was more and more worried by the suspicion that Beaumarchais had himself hatched the audacious libel, and had afterwards come forward to denounce the plot."

CHAPTER XIX

"THE BARBER OF SEVILLE"

ONE of the first results of the King's satisfaction with Beaumarchais was the removal of the veto on the performance of his singularly unlucky play.

The Barber of Seville, or *The Useless Precaution,* was written in 1772 as a comic opera in four acts. The music was adapted by the author from the folk and other songs we have seen him diligently collecting whilst in Spain. The musical attainments of Beaumarchais were hardly more than those of an unusually competent amateur, and it was left to the genius of Rossini and Mozart to set the seal of immortal melody on the two plays by which he is remembered. As for the libretto, although Beaumarchais had an extraordinary facility for rhyming (which, indeed, he shared with his whole family except his wife), we doubt whether he wrote a line of poetry in his life. He himself was aware of this disability, for he used pleasantly to say: "I am the first poet of Paris—entering from the Porte Saint Antoine."

The work was originally written for, and offered to, the Comédie Italienne, and promptly declined. "This refusal," says Gudin, "was due to the fact that the principal actor, Clairval, had started life as a barber, and was, therefore, disinclined to expose himself on the stage to the pleasantries of those who remembered the days when he actually plied the razor of Figaro for a livelihood." The story is interesting, but is perhaps an example of *esprit d'escalier* on the part of the disappointed author. In the face of this rebuff he immediately set about transforming the opera into a comedy with an eye on the Théâtre Français.

When completed, the piece was at once accepted by the premier theatre, and, having received the approbation of the censor, Marin, was to have been produced in February, 1773, but the dramatist's grotesque quarrel with the Duc de Chaulnes, immediately followed by the equally bizarre Goëzman trial, indefinitely postponed its representation. The extraordinary success of the Beaumarchais memoirs caused the company of the Théâtre Français to deem the moment opportune for producing the much advertised comedy. Their application being granted, the play was announced for Saturday, the 12th February, 1774. "All the boxes were sold," says Grimm, "for the first five performances," when on Thursday, the 10th, an order came again forbidding the play—this was the day on which Beaumarchais published the fourth and most brilliant of his pamphlets. The reason for this sudden prohibition was that the piece was currently reported to be full of satirical allusions to his late process and witticisms at the expense of the ruling classes. Beaumarchais hastened to point out that since the text of the piece had been in the hands of the Lieutenant of Police for over a year these rumours could not possibly be true. But all was in vain. It looked as if *The Barber of Seville* was doomed never to see the footlights.

Such was the position when the author set out on his secret missions. Upon his return from Vienna in December, 1774, he at once brought pressure to bear upon the authorities, and at last obtained the ardently desired permission. But meanwhile, the situation had changed, and he no longer felt himself bound by the assurance he had given the year before; and since the comedy had been so long prohibited on account of allusions which it did not originally contain, he now made up for the omission by inserting not only those jovial and searching criticisms of the existing social order for which the play is remarkable, but overloaded the text with the equivocal jokes, the coarse buffoonery, and the fescennine humour proper to the ancient Gallic farce. He could not bear to forgo a single sally of his exuberant and undisciplined wit. This is always a mistake, for the Muse is not always at home, even when her favourites call upon her. Moreover, he unwisely divided



J. F. La Harpe.

From a lithograph by Delpech.

96.

[*To face p.* 168.

the third act into two, lengthening the piece into five acts.

"It is always difficult," wrote La Harpe, "to fulfil great expectations. The piece seemed rather farcical, and its wearisome prolixity, its jokes in exceedingly bad taste, and its questionable morality combined to disgust and revolt the audience."*

The Barber of Seville was presented for the first time on the 23rd February, 1775, and fell flat.

But a work of art, like a good deed, is an act of faith, and faith even in its lowest form, self-confidence, is capable of all things—in reason. Beaumarchais had this kind of faith in a superlative degree. Convinced of the essential merit of his work, he shut himself in his study and recast the whole piece, reducing it to its original four acts, chastening it of the most scurrilous passages, and within a day and a night transformed a very faulty play (which had taken him two years of leisure to write) into a masterpiece of light comedy. "*The Barber of Seville*, in its final form," remarked La Harpe, "is the best constructed and the best written of all the dramatic works of Beaumarchais," and we are inclined to agree with him. A dismal failure on the Friday, it was revived on the Sunday, and has held the stage ever since.

We have deemed it expedient to translate the salient passages of this piece, and to summarize the rest, in order that the reader may be in a position, not only to judge its worth for himself, but to follow the many allusions to the life and times of Beaumarchais with which it abounds. He will also be able to see how far the author may be identified with the character, maxims and opinions of Figaro.

The plot of *The Barber of Seville* is not a new one: it is the time-honoured theme of an elderly and amorous guardian (Bartholo), who hopes to marry and possess himself of the fortune of his ward (Rosine), and how his schemes are all brought to naught by the intervention of a young and handsome lover (Count Almaviva), aided by Figaro, the wittiest and most resourceful of all valets.

The scene opens with the Count, disguised as a priest,

* La Harpe, *Correspondance Littéraire*, T. i., p. 99.

pacing to and fro before Bartholo's house, in the hope of catching sight of Rosine, who has attracted his attention whilst in Madrid with her guardian. He reflects aloud that he is tired of facile conquests, and "it's so sweet to be loved for oneself." At this moment Figaro enters, with a guitar slung over his shoulder, and paper and pencil in hand, in the throes of composition. He gaily sings the lines of his song, as he sets them down. . . .

"'Generous wine and idleness
Shall e'er dispute my heart!'

"Well, no! they don't dispute: they reign together quite peaceably.

"'Shall ever share my heart.'

"Is it right to say 'share?' Well, thank God, we makers of comic operas need not be so particular. Nowadays, what is not worth saying, we sing.

"'Generous wine and idleness
Shall ever share my heart.'

"I would like to end with something fine, brilliant, sparkling, which would look like an idea.

"'Shall ever share my heart:
If one inspires my tenderness
The other is my joy.'

"Confound it! that's bathos. That's not it. I want an antithesis.

"'If one is my mistress
The other . . .'

"Egad! I've got it!

"'The other shall be my maid.'

"Bravo, Figaro!

"Ha! wait till we have the accompaniment, then we shall see, gentlemen of the cabal, if I don't know what I'm talking about!"

Here the Count and Figaro recognize each other.

Count. I do believe it's that rascal Figaro!

Figaro. It is, my lord.

Count. You scoundrel! if you speak a word. . . .

Figaro. Yes. I recognize you, the same familiar kindness with which you have always honoured me.

Count. I did not recognize you at all. You have become so big and fat.

Figaro. What can you expect? It's through misery.

Count. Poor little man! But what are you doing in Seville? I thought I recommended you to a post in the government.

Figaro. I obtained it, my lord, and my gratitude. . . .

Count. Call me Lindor. Can't you see by my disguise that I don't want to be recognized?

Figaro. I will go.

Count. On the contrary. I am waiting for something here, and two men chatting together are less suspicious than one walking to and fro. Let us appear to be chatting. Well, what about this position?

Figaro. The minister, having considered your excellency's recommendation, at once appointed me apothecary's boy.

Count. To the military hospitals?

Figaro. No. In the stables of Andalusia.

Count (laughing). A fine beginning!

Figaro. The post was not so bad, for having the dressings and drugs in my charge, I often sold the men excellent horse medicines.

Count. Which killed His Majesty's subjects?

Figaro. Ha! Ha! Well, there is no universal remedy which has sometimes failed to cure Galicians, Catalans and Auvergnats.

Count. Then why did you leave?

Figaro. Leave, indeed! Somebody slandered me to the powers.

"Envy with clutching fingers, and pale livid face."

Count. Oh! for pity's sake, my good fellow! Do you dabble in verses too?

Figaro. That is just the cause of my misfortune, my lord. When it was reported to the minister that I was making, if I may say so, some rather neat little garlands of verse to Chloris; that I was sending riddles to the journals;

that madrigals of my composition were becoming all the rage; in short, when it was found that I was getting into print everywhere, he took the matter tragically, and dismissed me from the service on the pretext that a love of letters is incompatible with the spirit of business.

Count. Powerfully reasoned! But did you not represent to him . . .

Figaro. To tell the truth, I thought myself only too happy to be forgotten, being convinced that the great do us sufficient good when they do us no harm.

Count. You do not tell the whole story. I seem to remember that when you were in my service, you were rather a bad lot.

Figaro. Good God, my lord!—you expect the poor to be without faults?

Count. Idle, dissolute . . .

Figaro. Considering the virtues demanded of a servant, does your excellency know many masters worthy of being valets?

Count. Not so bad. So you retired to this city?

Figaro. No, not at once. On my return from Madrid, I tried my literary talents again, and the theatre seemed to me a field of honour.

Count. God-a-mercy!

Figaro. Really, I do not know why I did not have the greatest success, for I filled the pit with the most excellent workers,—the most mutton-fisted fellows I could find . . . and before the performance, the cafés seemed very well disposed towards me. But the efforts of the cabal . . .

Count. Ah! the cabal! I seem to have heard that story before!

Figaro. It's the fact, anyway. Why not? They hissed me, but if I could only get them together again!

Count. You would bore them to death by way of revenge?

Figaro. *Zounds*! I'd give it 'em hot!

Count. You swear! Do you know that in the Courts you have only twenty-four hours in which to curse your judges?

Figaro. Yes, but you have twenty-four years in the theatre: in fact, life is too short to exhaust such resentment.

Count. Your exhilarating anger does me good. But you have not told me what caused you to leave Madrid.

Figaro. My good angel, your excellency, since I am happy enough to find my old master again. Seeing that in Madrid the republic of letters is a republic of wolves, always at each others' throats, and that, delivered over to the contempt to which this ridiculous obstinacy leads them, all the insects, gnats, midges, critics, mosquitoes (*maringouins*)*, the envious, journalists, booksellers, censors, and in fact everything capable of clinging to the hide of unhappy men of letters, succeed in tearing and sucking away the little substance left to them ; worn out with writing, weary of myself, disgusted with others, swallowed up by debts and with empty pockets ; finally convinced that the certain revenue of the razor is preferable to the empty honours of the pen, I left Madrid ; and my baggage slung over my shoulder, philosophically journeying through the two Galicias, La Mancha, Estremadura, Sierra-Morena, and Andalusia, welcomed in one town, imprisoned in another, and everywhere superior to events ; praised by some, blamed by others ; helping forward the good time and gaily supporting the bad, twitting the fools and defying the wicked ; laughing at my misery and shaving everybody ;—you see me, at last established in Seville, and ready once more to serve your excellency in everything it may please you to order.

Count. Who taught you such a gay philosophy ?

Figaro. Close acquaintance with misfortune. I am always in a hurry to laugh at everything for fear of being constrained to weep.

Bartholo and Rosine now appear at a window on the first story, the latter holding a paper in her hand. Her suspicious guardian wants to know what it is. Only a few couplets from *The Useless Precaution*, which her singing master had given her yesterday. What is this *Useless Precaution ?* It is the new comedy. "Oh !" exclaims Bartholo, "another of those dramas in the foolish new style. Well, the journals and the authorities between them

* A dig at Marin. The whole scene obviously pictures his own experiences, and is quite unceremoniously dragged in here, with a superb contempt for the rules of the game.

will avenge us !" Rosine protests against his constant decrying of the new age. "Pardon me," says Bartholo, "but what has it produced that we should praise it ? Follies of all sorts : liberty of thought, gravitation, electricity, religious toleration, inoculation, quinine, the *Encyclopaedia*, and *dramas* . . ."

At this point Rosine suddenly drops her paper (which is of course a letter to her youthful admirer), and sends Bartholo to look for it, but before he can get downstairs, Rosine has signalled to the Count to pick it up and make off. On reaching a place of safety, the Count reads aloud the letter which is in these terms : "Your attentions excite my curiosity. As soon as my guardian goes out, sing casually to the well-known air of these couplets, a few words telling me the name, rank, and intentions of him who appears to interest himself so earnestly in the unhappy Rosine."

"My song ! I've lost my song !" cries Figaro, mimicking Rosine's voice. "Oh ! these women ! If you want to teach cunning to the most innocent of them, lock her up !"

The Count is delighted to find that Figaro knows quite a lot about Bartholo and his ward. "The house which I occupy," he says, "belongs to the doctor who lodges me there gratis." "Indeed !" exclaims the Count. "Yes," answers Figaro," and by way of showing my obligation, I promise him in return ten gold pistoles a year—also gratis." "You are his tenant !" cries the Count eagerly. "More than that," pursues Figaro, "I am his barber, his surgeon, his apothecary ; there is not a stroke of the razor, lancet or syringe in his house which does not come from the hand of your excellency's humble servant."

Almaviva there and then agrees to take Figaro into his service again, and they arrange for the lover to seek admission to the doctor's house by disguising himself as a drunken soldier bearing a billeting order from the new commandant of the town.

At this moment Bartholo emerges from his house, and the confederates overhear him say to some one within that he is going to see Basile, Rosine's music master, urging him to hasten the arrangements for the guardian's secret marriage to his ward on the morrow.

Directly they are alone, Figaro urges his master to take

his guitar and sing to Rosine the information about himself, according to her instructions, but to conceal his high rank, and tell her he is Lindor, a simple student, without fortune or prospects. On the lover's expressing diffidence as to his ability to compose the necessary verses, Figaro encourages him by asserting: "In love, the heart is not hard to please with the productions of the mind." As the song ends, Rosine is heard within singing a confession of her love for Lindor.

"That settles it!" cried the Count in his excitement, "I am Rosine's as long as I breathe!"

"You forget, my lord, that she no longer hears you!" Figaro reminds him.

The next scene is between Figaro and Rosine.

Figaro. How is your health, madam?

Rosine. Not very good, Master Figaro: dullness is killing me.

Figaro. I can well believe it: only fools flourish upon it.

Rosine. To whom were you speaking with such animation below? I did not hear you: but . . .

Figaro. A young bachelor relative of mine, of the greatest ability, full of wit, talent and fine feeling, with a most prepossessing face.

Rosine. Oh, I am sure of it! You say his name is . .?

Figaro. Lindor. He is penniless, but if he had not left Madrid so hurriedly, he might have found a good place there.

Rosine. He will find one, Master Figaro, he will find one. A young man such as you describe is not likely to remain unknown.

Figaro. But he has one great fault, which will always stand in his way.

Rosine. A fault, Master Figaro! a fault! Are you quite sure?

Figaro. He is in love.

Rosine. He is in love! Do you call that a fault?

Figaro. To tell the truth, it is only one in respect of his lack of means.

Rosine. Ah! How unjust is fate! And has he named the lady he loves. I am so curious to know.

Figaro. You are the last person, madam, to whom I would reveal a secret of this nature.

Rosine (eagerly). Why, Master Figaro? I assure you I am discreet. The young man is your relative, he interests me immensely . . . Do tell me!

Figaro (looking at her slyly). Picture to yourself the prettiest little darling, sweet, tender, fresh and gracious, appetizing, with a shy little foot, slim, dainty figure, rounded arms, rosy mouth and hands! cheeks! teeth! eyes! . . .

Rosine. Who lives in this city?

Figaro. In this very quarter.

Rosine. In this street perhaps?

Figaro. Two feet away from me.

Rosine. Ah! How charming . . . for your relative. And this young lady is?

Figaro. Have I not named her?

Rosine. That is the one thing you have forgotten, Master Figaro. Tell me! Do tell me now: if somebody comes in I might never know!

Figaro. Do you really want to know, madam? Very well, this young person is . . . your guardian's ward.

Rosine. Ward?

Figaro. Doctor Bartholo's ward; yes, madam.

Rosine. Ah! Master Figaro, I'm sure I don't believe you!

Figaro. Of that he is burning to come himself and convince you.

Rosine. You make me tremble, Master Figaro.

Figaro. Come! come! madam. Tremble, indeed! That will not do at all, when once you give way to the fear of evil, you already experience the evil of fear.

Rosine. If he loves me, he must prove it by keeping absolutely quiet.

Figaro. What, madam! can love and tranquillity live together in the same heart? Young people are so unfortunately situated nowadays, they have only this terrible alternative, love without peace, or peace without love.

Rosine (lowering her eyes). Peace without love . . . seems . . .

Figaro. Oh! very slow. It seems, indeed, that love

without peace cuts a better figure altogether, and, as for me, if I were a woman . . .

Rosine (blushing). It is certain that a young lady cannot prevent a worthy man from esteeming her . . .

Figaro. My relative, accordingly, esteems you enormously.

Rosine. But if he should commit some imprudence, Master Figaro, he would ruin us !

Figaro (aside). He would ruin *us*. (Aloud.) If you would expressly forbid him in a little note . . . A letter has such power !

Rosine (giving him the letter she has just written). I have no time to re-write this ; but when you give it to him, tell him . . . be sure and tell him that it is purely out of friendship that I do it . . . you understand ? . . . My only fear is that discouraged by difficulties . . .

Her guardian is now heard downstairs, and Rosine takes up her needlework, whilst Figaro discreetly withdraws.

Bartholo enters the room cursing Figaro at the top of his voice for playing a series of practical jokes on his servants, by which one is set constantly gaping and the other perpetually sneezing. Having exhausted his vocabulary, he turns on Rosine and quarrels with her on account of the letter she let drop over the balcony, expressing the suspicion that Figaro has just been with her intriguing to get her carried off.

Rosine. What ! will you not even allow that one has principles to set against the seductions of Master Figaro ?

Bartholo. Who the devil knows anything about the caprices of women ? Besides, how many of these high-principled virtues have I seen . . .

Rosine. But, sir, if it suffices to be a man in order to please us, why is it you displease me so much ?

In her rage, she admits that Figaro has been with her. " I found him very agreeable," she says, " and may you die of vexation ! "

Bartholo now shouts for his servants La Jeunesse and L'Éveillé, who hasten to obey his summons, the first still

sneezing, and the second still yawning. Their master accuses them of collusion with Figaro.

La Jeunesse. But, sir, is there (*aa-choo !*) . . any justice !

Bartholo. Justice ! justice for such wretches as you ! I am your master : therefore I am always right.

La Jeunesse. Yes, but hang it ! . . . (*aa-choo !*) . . . when a thing is true. . . .

Bartholo. When a thing is true ! If I don't want a thing to be true I claim that it isn't true. Let these rascals be right, and you'll soon see what will become of authority !

Basile, Rosine's music master and the doctor's accomplice in his designs on his ward, now calls to warn him that Almaviva has come to live in Seville, and advises him that the most effective means of driving him off is to slander him. (Figaro, hidden in a cabinet, overhears this conversation.)

"That is a strange way of getting rid of a man !" comments Bartholo.

"Slander, my dear sir," answers Basile, in an oft-quoted passage, "is not to be so despised. I have seen the most honourable men almost ruined by it. Believe me, there is no stupid malignity, no abomination, no silly tale which will not be credited by the indolent people of a great city, if you set about it in the right way : and we have here some of the cleverest fellows at the game ! First a light rumour skimming over the ground like a swallow before the storm, *pianissimo* murmur and twist, and it is gone, leaving a poisonous trail behind. So-and-so welcomes it, and *piano*, *piano* adroitly slips it into your ear. The evil is done ! It sprouts, crawls, makes its way everywhere, and *rinforzando*, from mouth to mouth, it spreads like the very devil ; then, suddenly and unaccountably, you see slander raising its head, hissing, swelling, and growing before your eyes. It darts forward, extends its sway, whirls, envelopes, tears, bursts, thunders, and carrying all before it, becomes, thank heaven, a general cry, a public *crescendo*, a universal chorus of hatred and destruction. Who the deuce can withstand it ?"

Although not quite convinced by this outburst, Bartholo, nevertheless, determines to hasten the arrange-

ments for his marriage, and reproaches Basile for not having carried out his instructions more expeditiously.

"Yes," says Basile, "but you shouldn't have haggled over the expenses. In the harmony of good order, a secret marriage, an iniquitous judgment, an obvious miscarriage of justice, are difficulties which you must always be on the look-out for and prevent by the perfect accord of gold." Bartholo gives more money, and Basile promises to fix up the ceremony for the following day. The prudent doctor follows his visitor downstairs and carefully closes the door after him.

The reader will not have failed to observe that the incongruity of Basile's conversation in this scene is due to its being one of the interpolated passages, previously referred to, in which Beaumarchais the dramatist could not resist the temptation (even at the expense of hanging up the action of the play) of avenging Beaumarchais the disappointed and resentful litigant.

"Oh! what a famous precaution!" exclaims Figaro, issuing from his retreat. "Shut the door, and I will open it again to let the Count in as I go out. But what a rogue that Basile is! Luckily he is a bigger fool still. To make a sensation in the world as a slanderer you want to be a man of position, family, name, rank—substance, in short.* But a Basile!—he can slander as much as he likes and nobody will believe him!"

In the following scene between Bartholo and Rosine, the doctor guesses that she has been writing another letter. His shrewdness completely corners her, and reduces her to a state bordering on nervous collapse. Almaviva now joins them, disguised as a soldier, mellow with wine, bearing an order on the doctor to billet him for the night. In the following conversation he contrives to pass a letter to Rosine, but the guardian's sharp eyes detect the movement, whereupon the Count pretends merely to be restoring to her a letter she has dropped, and Rosine slips the missive into the pocket of her apron. Bartholo shows that he is exempted from the obligation of billeting, and orders Almaviva away.

* A shaft which could hardly fail to reach the address of the Comte de la Blache.

"Very well, doctor," answers the Count, "I will go. Good-bye, doctor! But just to show that you bear no ill will, pray that Death may overlook me for a few more campaigns: life has never been so dear to me!"

"Be off with you, now! If I had so much credit with Death. . . ."

"Are you not a doctor? You do so much for Death, that it can surely refuse you nothing!"

Alone with Rosine, Bartholo at once accuses her of having received a letter from the drunken soldier, and demands to be allowed to see it. Rosine asserts that it was only a note from her cousin which had dropped from her pocket; but her guardian is certain that she is not telling the truth, and goes to lock the door, preparatory to taking the letter from her by force. Meanwhile Rosine substitutes her cousin's letter for the Count's. After securing the door, Bartholo seizes her by the wrists and throws her upon a chair. She complains that his brutality has made her feel faint, and the doctor, whilst giving her medical aid, takes the letter from her pocket to read, but finds that it is, as she said, her cousin's note. Seeing, as he thinks, that he is clearly in the wrong, he endeavours to make amends, and they soon become friends again.

"If only you could love me!" sighs Bartholo, "how happy you would be!"

"If only you could please me," replies Rosine, "how I would love you!"

On reading Lindor's letter, she finds that he asks her to pick a quarrel with her guardian, and she is in despair at having let such an excellent opportunity escape her. However, she reflects, an unjust man will make a schemer of innocence itself, and a reasonable excuse for falling out with Bartholo is never far to seek. When, therefore, Almaviva makes his appearance, stating that he is Alonzo and comes to deputize for Basile, who is ill, the relations between the pair are as strained as ever. The doctor, however, suspects some trickery, and at last, to avoid being ignominiously dismissed, the Count is reduced to handing him Rosine's letter, which, he says, Basile has begged him to do on his behalf, and to assure him that arrangements have been made with a lawyer for the wedding to take

place the next day. If Rosine resists, they will show her the letter, and Lindor will tell her that he got it through another woman, for whose sake Almaviva had abandoned her.

"Slander, my dear fellow!" laughs Bartholo. "I quite see now that you have come straight from Basile."

All suspicion allayed, the doctor now goes to seek Rosine for her lesson. Upon entering the room she is so taken aback by seeing the Count that she utters a cry, and instantly recovers herself by pretending she has twisted her ankle in turning. The lovers, still in the presence of the vigilant Bartholo, whom it is impossible to shake off, sing together the song from *The Useless Precaution*. Figaro now enters for the purpose of shaving the doctor. But the latter angrily turns upon him for his excess of zeal in drugging his servants. "What have you to say to the poor wretch who gapes and sleeps ever since you tended him, or to the other who for the last three hours has sneezed enough to blow his brains out?"

"What have I to say to them?"

"Yes."

Figaro. Well, I should say. . . . Why, yes, I should say to him who sneezes: "God bless you!" and to him who yawns: "Go to bed!"

Bartholo. You would do better, master quibbler, to pay me my hundred crowns with interest, without any more nonsense, so I warn you!

Figaro. Do you doubt my honesty, sir? Your hundred crowns! Why, I would rather owe them to you all my life than deny the debt for a single moment. . . .

When at last the quarrel is over, Bartholo sends Figaro for the shaving things, in order not to leave the Count and Rosine together. During his absence Bartholo whispers to the Count that he is the rascal who brought the letter. At this moment there is a crash of crockery, which draws the doctor from the room, and Almaviva takes the opportunity to beg Rosine to grant him a secret interview that night and to fly with him. He is about to explain how he had been compelled to give Bartholo her letter, when the latter returns with Figaro. Under cover of the confusion caused by the crash, Figaro has possessed himself of the key of the window shutters.

To the consternation of the lovers, Basile now enters the room.

Bartholo. Ah ! Basile, my good fellow ; I see you have quickly recovered. Your accident has had no ill consequences ? Master Alonzo quite frightened me about you : ask him : I was on the point of coming to see you, and if he had not dissuaded me. . .

Basile. Master Alonzo !

Figaro here seeks to create a diversion, but the newcomer is too astonished to be put off.

Basile. Will you give me the pleasure, gentlemen ? . . .

Figaro. You can speak to him when I am gone.

Basile. Yes, but . . .

Count. You should keep quiet, Basile. Do you think you can tell him anything he doesn't know ? I have already told him that you sent me to give a music lesson in your place.

Basile (still more astonished). A music lesson ! Alonzo !

Rosine (whispering to Basile). Oh ! hold your tongue.

Basile. She too !

Count (aside to Bartholo). Tell him quickly that we have come to an agreement.

Bartholo (aside to Basile). Don't give us away, Basile, by saying that he is not your pupil—you will spoil everything.

Basile. Ha ! ha !

Bartholo. Really, Basile, you have a most talented pupil.

Basile (in great astonishment). My pupil ! (Aside to Bartholo.) I came to tell you that the Count has moved.

Bartholo (whispers). I know. Hold your tongue !

Basile. Who told you ?

Bartholo. He, of course.

Count. I, certainly : if you would only listen !

Rosine (whispering to Basile). Is it so difficult to hold your tongue ?

Figaro. Hum ! you great hippogrif ! He's deaf !

Basile. Then who the devil is it they are deceiving here ? Everybody seems to be in the secret !

Bartholo. Well, Basile, what about your lawyer ?

Figaro. You will have the whole evening to talk about the lawyer.

Bartholo. Only one word: are you satisfied with the lawyer ?

Basile (frightened). The lawyer ?

Count (smiling). What, haven't you seen the lawyer ?

Basile (angrily). No !—I tell you I haven't seen the lawyer.

Count (to Bartholo). Do you want him to explain everything before her ? Send him away.

Bartholo (whispering to the Count). You are right (To Basile). But what made you ill so suddenly ?

Basile (in a rage). I don't understand you.

Count (taking him aside and putting a purse in his hand). Yes, the doctor asks what you are doing here, ill as you are.

Figaro. His face is as pale as death.

Basile. Ha ! I understand. . . .

Count. Go home to bed, my dear Basile ; you are not well, and you frighten us horribly. Go home to bed.

Figaro. He looks terribly bad. Go home to bed !

Bartholo. Upon my word, he is as feverish as he can be !

Rosine. Why did you come out ? They say it's catching. Go home to bed !

Basile (in the utmost astonishment). Go home to bed ?

All together. Yes, certainly.

Basile (staring at them). Indeed, I think it would be as well to go : I do feel rather out of sorts.

Bartholo. See you to-morrow : if you are better.

Count. Basile, I shall call upon you early in the morning.

Figaro. Take my advice, and wrap yourself up warmly in bed.

Rosine. Good night ! Master Basile.

Basile (aside). Damned if I know what to make of it !—and if it wasn't for this purse. . . .

All. Good night, Basile ! Good night !

Basile (savagely). Oh, well ! Good night !

They all accompany him to the door, laughing.

After this dismissal, Figaro proceeds with his shaving

of the doctor, and tries to manœuvre a little private conversation between the lovers, but the ever-watchful Bartholo surprises them and overhears enough of their talk to discover that he has been outwitted. Rosine, before retiring to her apartment, turns angrily upon the doctor and openly defies him, whilst Almaviva and Figaro pretend that he is mad, and hastily leave the house.

The last act opens with a conversation between Bartholo and Basile on the eventful night arranged for the marriage. It is raining in torrents.

Bartholo. What, Basile—you do not know him? Is what you say possible?

Basile. Ask me a hundred times, and I should always give you the same answer. If he gave you Rosine's letter, he is certainly one of the Count's emissaries. But, judging by the magnificence of the present he gave me, he may very well be the Count himself.

Bartholo. That is not likely! But, talking about this present; why did you take it?

Basile. You seemed to have come to an agreement; I could not understand what was afoot: and whenever I am confronted with a difficult question, a purse of gold always seems to me an unanswerable argument. Then, as the proverb says: What is good to take . . .

Bartholo. I understand . . . is good . . .

Basile. To keep.

Bartholo. Ha! ha!

Basile. Yes, I have arranged several little proverbs like that with variations. But to come to the point, what have you decided?

Bartholo. If you were in my place, Basile, would you not do your utmost to possess her?

Basile. My goodness! no, doctor! In every kind of property possession is little, it is enjoyment of it which gives happiness: I think that to marry a woman who does not love you is to expose yourself. . . .

Bartholo. You would be afraid of accidents?

Basile. Hee-hee! sir. . . . There are many of them this year. I would not do violence to her heart.

Bartholo. Your servant, Basile. It is better that she should weep at having me than that I should die for not having her.

Basile. Oh! is it a matter of life and death? Then, marry, doctor, marry.

Bartholo. That's what I intend to do this very night.

Basile. Farewell, then. . . . Don't forget, in speaking to your ward, to make them out as black as hell.

Bartholo. You are quite right.

Basile. Slander, doctor, slander! You must always come back to that.

Bartholo. Here's Rosine's letter which that fellow Alonzo gave me, and unwillingly showed me what use to make of it with her.

Basile. Farewell: we shall all be here at four o'clock.

Bartholo. Why not sooner?

Basile. Impossible; the notary is engaged.

Bartholo. For a marriage?

Basile. Yes, at the barber Figaro's; his niece is to be married.

Bartholo. His niece?—but he hasn't one.

Basile. Anyhow, that's what they told the notary.

Bartholo. That scoundrel is in the plot; what the devil! . . .

Basile. Do you really think? . . .

Bartholo. My goodness! those beggars are so wide awake! Look you here, my friend, I am not at all easy. Return to the notary and ask him to come back with you at once.

Basile. It is raining infernally; but nothing shall stop me from serving you. What are you going to do?

Bartholo. I'll see you out. That rascal Figaro has put all my servants out of action: I'm alone here.

Basile. I have my lantern.

Bartholo. Now, Basile, here is my master key; I'll wait for you and keep watch. Come who may, except you and the notary, nobody shall come in to-night.

Basile. With such precautions all is sure.

Bartholo, without losing a moment, seeks out Rosine, shows her the letter she wrote to Almaviva and tells her of the plot he has discovered to secure her person, and that he owed the betrayal of the secret to the jealousy of a successful rival. Overwhelmed by the alleged perfidy of the Count, Rosine consents to marry her guardian

that very night. Directly the doctor leaves her, she bursts into tears and bewails her fate.

At this moment, all being quiet, Figaro and the Count enter by the window.

Figaro. We are wet through! Charming weather for love-making, my lord. What do you think of the night ?

Count. Superb for a lover !

Figaro. Yes, but for a confidant ? . . . And if somebody surprise us here ?

Count. Aren't you with me. It is quite another matter that worries me : that is to persuade her to leave her guardian's house immediately.

Figaro. You have on your side three passions all-powerful with the fair sex : love, hatred, and fear.

Count (gazing into the darkness). How can I announce to her abruptly that the notary is waiting at your house to unite us ? She will think my plan foolhardy : she will call me presumptuous.

Figaro. If she calls you presumptuous, you should call her cruel. Women love to be called cruel. If her love is such as you desire, you can tell her who you are : she will no longer have any doubt of your sentiments.

On the entrance of Rosine there is a scene of bitter tears and reproaches on her part in which she renounces the Count, whom she has learnt to love as Lindor, for his supposed betrayal of her to Almaviva. The Count, however, soon explains the misunderstanding and convinces her of the sincerity of his passion, revealing to her for the first time his true name and position. On the reconciliation of the lovers, the Count promises to punish the odious old fellow who has been the cause of all the mischief ; but the tender-hearted Rosine pleads for him : "No, no, pardon him, dear Lindor," she says. "My heart is so full that vengeance can find no place in it."

The notary, armed with two marriage contracts, now enters with Basile. The lawyer, seeing that the lady's name in each document is the same, intelligently supposes that the brides are two sisters who bear the same name. As for Basile, he does not know what to make of it, but his

scruples are quickly overcome by the Count, who hands him a purse and engages him as a witness. "There is no further difficulty," says Basile, weighing the purse in his hand; "but that is because when I have once given my word, there must be reasons of great weight. . . ." And he signs.

Bartholo, with a justice of the peace, police officers and servants, at this moment rush into the room. He sees the Count kissing Rosine's hand, and Figaro grotesquely embracing Basile. With a savage cry, he seizes the notary by the throat.

Bartholo. Rosine with these rascals! Arrest them all. I've got one of them by the collar.

Notary. I am your notary.

Basile. He is your notary. What are you playing at?

Bartholo. Ha! Don Basile! How is it you are here?

Basile. Say, rather, how is it you were not here?

Justice (pointing at Figaro). One moment; I know him. What are you doing in this house at this time of night?

Figaro. This time of night! You must see that it is as near morning as night. Besides, I belong to the retinue of his Excellency, my Lord Count Almaviva.

Bartholo. Almaviva!

Justice. They are not thieves, then?

Bartholo. Never mind that.—Everywhere else, my lord Count, I am your excellency's humble servant; but you must understand that here your superiority of rank is without effect. Have the goodness, if you please, to retire.

Count. Yes, rank is powerless here; but what is very pertinent to the situation is the preference to yourself which the young lady has accorded me by voluntarily giving herself to me.

Bartholo. What is that he says, Rosine?

Rosine. It is true. Why should you be astonished? Was I not this night to be avenged on a deceiver? I am.

Basile. Didn't I tell you it was the Count himself, doctor?

Bartholo. What does that matter to me? A pretty marriage!—Where are the witnesses?

Notary. There is nothing wanting. I was assisted by these two gentlemen.

Bartholo. What, Basile ! . . . You signed ?

Basile. Why not ? This devil of a fellow always has his pockets full of irresistible arguments.

Bartholo. I snap my fingers at his arguments. I shall make use of my authority.

Count. You have lost it by abusing it.

Bartholo. The young lady is a minor.

Figaro. She has just come of age.

Bartholo. Who is speaking to you, you rogue ?

Count. The young lady is noble and beautiful ; I am a man of rank, young and rich ; she is my wife ; by this title, which honours us both, do you claim to dispute her with me ?

Bartholo. You shall never take her out of my hands.

Count. She is no longer in your power. I put her under the protection of the law ; and this gentleman whom you have brought yourself, will protect her from any violence you propose to offer her. True magistrates are the protectors of all the oppressed.

Justice. Certainly. And this useless resistance to a most honourable marriage shows how frightened he is over his maladministration of his ward's property, of which he will have to render a strict account.

Count. Ah ! let him but agree to everything, and I shall ask nothing more of him.

Figaro. Except the receipt for my hundred crowns : don't let us lose our heads !

Bartholo (angrily). They were all against me. . . . I've thrust my head into a booby-trap !

Basile. Booby-trap be hanged ! Remember, doctor, that although you cannot have the girl, you keep the money, and . . .

Bartholo. Oh ! leave me alone, Basile ! You think only of money. What do I care for money ! Of course, I'll keep it, but do you think that is the reason which decides me ? (He signs.)

Figaro. Ha ! ha ! ha ! my lord, they belong to the same family.

Notary. But, gentlemen, I don't understand at all. Are there not two young ladies who bear the same name ?

Figaro. No, sir, there is only one.

Bartholo (in despair). And it was I who took away the ladder, only to make the marriage more certain! Ah! I have defeated my own purpose through lack of care.

Figaro. Rather through lack of sense. . . . But to tell the truth, doctor, when love and youth have agreed to deceive an old man, everything he does to prevent it may well be called *The Useless Precaution.*

At the time of the production of *The Barber of Seville,* it was unkindly said that Beaumarchais had borrowed largely from Sedaine's *On ne s'avise jamais de tout.* One of those dullards who delight to repeat unpleasant things, chose the moment when the new dramatist was surrounded by people in the green-room, to tell him in a loud voice that his play was very like *You can never think of Everything.* "Very like, sir?" he replied. "I claim that my piece is *You can never think of Everything.*"

"How do you make that out?"

"Because nobody had ever thought of my piece."

The critic was abashed, and everybody laughed all the more because, says Beaumarchais, "he who reproached me with *You can never think of Everything,* was a person who never thought of anything!"

Most people are of Cleon's opinion in *Le Méchant,* that "fools are here below for our amusement," and for his part Beaumarchais thought they were fair game. But lack of understanding, is, after all, a misfortune, and however irritating it may be to have to deal with a naturally dense person, it is just as cruel and irrational to jeer at his dullness as to laugh at the deformity of a cripple. Yet, such is human nature, that however fully we realize this fact, we shall probably be as impatient as ever with the very next fool we encounter.

CHAPTER XX

BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE CHEVALIER D'ÉON

BEAUMARCHAIS was now rapidly gaining ground. The applause attending the production of *The Barber of Seville* was still at its height when he resumed his journeying to and fro between Paris and London, in connection with the suppression of libellous publications, for which there was such a steady and encouraging demand. Whilst in England, he maintained a regular correspondence with M. de Sartine and kept him informed of all that was going on in the political and social life of this country, especially with reference to the revolt of the Colonies. For this purpose he attended every important debate in the House of Commons and sought the society of the Opposition leaders, where he was soon a welcome guest. It was at this time that he became the intimate of Wilkes and his friends. Louis took an ever increasing interest in his shrewd and discriminating reports, and the Government now decided to pit him against a man of a notoriety as great as his own, quite as clever and almost as witty as himself, whose life, like his own, will ever be one of the most amazing stories outside the pages of fiction.

The Chevalier d'Éon de Beaumont was born at Tonnerre, on the 5th October, 1728. As a very young man he distinguished himself in the secret diplomatic service under the Comte de Broglie, which Louis XV. conducted unknown to his ministers. He accompanied Sir Mackenzie Douglas on his perilous mission to the Court of Russia with the object of securing the election of the Prince de Conti to the throne of Poland. It was said that the intrepidity and resourcefulness of the young diplomat were largely re-



Sophie Arnould.

After the pastel by Latour.



The Chevalier D'Éon.

From the portrait by Angelica Kauffman after Latour.

[*To face p.* 190.

sponsible for the success of the negotiations, and that he had achieved this gratifying result by remaining behind, after the departure of his chief, disguising himself as a woman, and getting himself appointed as *lectrice* to the Empress Elizabeth. This was probably a myth, but it was widely believed at the time and was later vouched for by Elizabeth's one-time favourite—the Princess Dashkova. For his services he was made, first, a lieutenant and soon afterwards a captain of dragoons, and served with distinction in the later stages of the Seven Years' War, in the course of which he was twice badly wounded. On the conclusion of the campaign, he was specially chosen as secretary to the Duc de Nivernais in his mission to England to negotiate the Peace of Versailles. The Duc, having the utmost confidence in his character and ability, consulted him in everything, and on his own return to France, exerted all his influence to procure for his protégé the post of minister plenipotentiary, pending the appointment of the new ambassador. D'Éon was then not quite thirty-six, and this rapid success completely turned his head, so that when the Comte de Guerchy, the new ambassador, arrived some months later, he immediately quarrelled with him in the most scandalous manner, declined to accept his dismissal, and refused to give up the documents relating to the bribery and corruption by which the Treaty had been engineered. Attempt after attempt was made by de Guerchy to recover the papers and arrest the recalcitrant secretary, but the latter converted his house into a stronghold, garrisoned with ex-dragoons, and defied the ambassador and his agents to do their worst; whilst his astuteness readily overcame every stratagem employed against him. Louis, fearful lest his secret should be betrayed, sent a small band of his most trusted police officers to kidnap the rebel. They surrounded the house in which he was reported to be taking refuge and suddenly broke into his sitting-room, but failed to recognize their prey in the elegant lady engaged in an animated conversation with the old gentlewoman who owned the house. At last Louis himself requested the English Government to extradite the Chevalier, but d'Éon well knew that the English law was even a safer protection than "the four pairs of pistols, the two guns, and the eight sabres" of his

garrison, and Lord Halifax, when questioned on the subject, said: "He had better keep quiet: tell him his conduct is abominable, but his person is inviolable." De Guerchy was at last compelled to confess to his Sovereign the failure of all his attempts to recover the papers.

D'Éon now published a selection of the documents in a witty libellous attack on the ambassador in which he accused de Guerchy of attempting to poison him. The scandal reached its climax when, on March 1st, 1765, the case came before Lord Mansfield at the Old Bailey, and the Grand Jury returned a true bill against the Comte for conspiracy against the life of the Chevalier. In great glee at this astounding success, d'Éon wrote to his chief, the Comte de Broglie: "It is absolutely necessary that you should be here without loss of time . . . This is the last letter which I shall have the honour of writing to you on the subject of the poisoner, that rascal de Guerchy, who, if he had his deserts, would be broken on the wheel in France; but, by the grace of God, he will only be hanged in England."

The Government, alarmed by the dangerous feeling aroused in the two countries, caused the case to be transferred by writ to the Court of King's Bench, and no further action was taken. The position of the ambassador, however, before long became intolerable, and he returned to France a few years later, broken in health, and died shortly afterwards, it is said, from worry over the ridicule and disgrace which had befallen him.

Louis, thinking it inexpedient to drive d'Éon to desperation, personally wrote a flattering letter to the Chevalier announcing that he had decided to reward him for his many and brilliant services by granting him a pension of 12 000 livres for life. In this, the King, who was a shrewd judge of men, was doubtless actuated not only by fear for the keeping of his secret but also by a desire to retain in his hidden diplomacy d'Éon's extraordinary ability for political intrigue. For the next seven years the Chevalier supplied the King, through de Broglie, with a series of witty and sagacious political letters on English affairs. Besides this, he was the author of thirteen octavo volumes on war, national administration, general political principles, foreign affairs and state finance. "If you would know what I am," he wrote to the Duc de Praslin, "I

tell you candidly that I am good only at thinking, imagining, questioning, reflecting, comparing, reading, writing, at running from east to west, from north to south, and at fighting everywhere. If I had lived in the time of Alexander or of Don Quixote, I should assuredly have been Parmenion or Sancho Panza. Taken out of my element, I would squander the revenue of France in a twelvemonth and then write you an admirable treatise on the management of national finance."

Beaumarchais and d'Éon came into contact with each other, although they did not actually meet, at the time of the Morande scandal. The Chevalier had offered to induce the blackmailer, over whom he claimed considerable influence, to abandon his project on payment of £800, and was on the point of concluding the bargain, when the matter was suddenly taken out of his hands, and, as he says, "the Sieur Caron de Beaumarchais arrived in London, *incognito*, escorted by the Comte de Lauraguais *in publico*," to continue the negotiations.

Before accepting their enhanced offer, Morande called to consult d'Éon, and mentioned that "two gentlemen were waiting in their carriage at the corner of the street to confer with the Chevalier." The latter curtly declined to see them. He remarked, however, to Morande in dismissing him that "the love affairs of Kings being very delicate matters for anybody to meddle with, he was exposing himself to the perils associated with the calling of a highwayman; that such being the case, he was justified in demanding the largest sum out of the richest coach he might encounter, and that his own contained only eight hundred pounds sterling."

He afterwards heard that the two gentlemen whom he had refused to see "were the unknown Caron de Beaumarchais and the most illustrious and well-known Louis François de Brancas, Comte de Lauraguais." It is clear that even thus early there was no love lost between the pair.

It was about 1771 that doubts began to arise as to the sex of this ex-captain of dragoons and famous swordsman. The source from which they sprang remains a mystery, and the Chevalier himself took no trouble to dispel the rumours; on the contrary, he seemed rather to encourage the questioners by his equivocal replies. The mystification

soon became a subject of absorbing interest in sporting and other circles of " high life " and large sums of money were wagered (according to Bachaumont over £100,000 in England alone) as to whether d'Éon was a woman in disguise. His slight figure, high-pitched voice and delicate features, combined with the care he took to avoid any close relationship with members of the fair sex, seemed to support this view. It may be noted in passing that these extraordinary rumours coincided with the Chevalier's serious financial embarrassment, brought about by his extravagant mode of living. It soon became a generally accepted opinion that he was indeed a woman, and at last he himself admitted the soft impeachment. The new ambassador, M. du Châtelet, hastened to inform the King of the current belief, which he himself shared. Even the shrewd and worldly-wise Casanova was taken in :

" The King," he wrote in his *Mémoires*, " alone knew and always had known, that d'Éon was a woman, and the entire quarrel between the sham Chevalier and the Foreign Office was a farce which the King allowed to be played for his own amusement " ; whilst the grave historian of French Diplomacy, M. de Flassan, writing in 1809, a year before the Chevalier's death, testified to the brilliant services of " this remarkable but wrong-headed woman."

On the death of Louis XV. his secret became everybody's secret and the agents of his hidden diplomacy were dismissed ; but on the intercession of the Comte de Broglie, an exception was made in the case of d'Éon, and he was informed that in return for the papers in his possession he would be allowed to return to France and his pension would be assured to him for life. But the Chevalier indignantly refused. He was overwhelmed with debts, and an ex-Minister Plenipotentiary of France and a Knight of the Order of St. Louis " could not run away—as so many worthless Frenchmen who had duped the generous English, had not scrupled to do." He had promised " never to quit the island until he had met all his engagements." In other words, perhaps, the watch on foreign debtors had become more vigilant. D'Éon now formally declared to the new King and the Minister for Foreign Affairs the terms he was willing to accept. In the account rendered, which he enclosed in his letter, he claims fifteen years' full

pay as captain of dragoons, the reimbursement of the amount he had recklessly squandered whilst in charge of the Legation; with the cost of twelve years' food and lodging in London for himself and his cousin, amounting to 100,000 livres; another 6,000 livres, the value of a diamond ring offered to him by Prince Poniatovsky during his mission to Russia, which he had then refused; "24,000 livres to replace the thousand guineas which the King of England is in the habit of bestowing upon Ministers Plenipotentiary residing at his Court, but had been dissuaded by Guerchy from giving him; 27,000 livres to cover the estimated value of certain family papers lost by Hugonnet at the time of his arrest; and 15,000 livres for the loss he had incurred through being unable to look after his vineyards during the past ten years." These, with several other items, brought his total claim up to about 300,000 livres.

Louis XVI. declared that he had never seen "a more impertinent and preposterous document than d'Êon's statement, and but for the importance of the papers in his hands, he would certainly have nothing more to do with him."

It was in the spring of 1775 that Beaumarchais and d'Êon first made acquaintance, "led, no doubt," as the Chevalier afterwards asserted, "by a curiosity natural to extraordinary animals to seek each other's society." As a matter of fact, however, it was he who made the preliminary advances, through Morande. In their first interview, d'Êon, (who had the feminine gift of tears) distressfully admitted to the father of Figaro that he was really a woman, and proceeded to relate a touching narrative of the misfortunes and embarrassments of his life, proudly claiming, however, to have preserved through the noisy promiscuity of army life and the perils of desperate sieges and battles, "that flower of purity, the precious but fragile token, alas! of our morality and faith!" The biographers of the protagonists in this amazing comedy would have us believe that Beaumarchais, the astute and experienced man of the world, was completely duped and outwitted. In this we differ from them. But, however this may be, the Chevalier certainly succeeded in interesting Beaumarchais in his case, or the pair may possibly have come to a secret understanding. From the bitterness

with which d'Éon after their final quarrel always spoke of Beaumarchais and his satellite Morande, we are inclined to think this was probably the case. At any rate, Beaumarchais decided to intervene on the Chevalier's behalf, and wrote to the King : " I venture to assure you, Sire, that this astonishing creature, if treated with kindness and consideration, will, though soured by twelve years of misfortune, be easily amenable to discipline, and will, upon reasonable terms, give up the papers relative to the late King."

From the care which Beaumarchais takes, in at least the early part of this correspondence, to avoid the use of personal pronouns, it is clear to us what he then considered to be the nature of d'Éon's misfortune. In spite of the fact revealed at the inquest thirty-two years later, we think the author of *The Barber of Seville* made quite a shrewd guess, and that the real explanation of the Chevalier's ultimate willingness to comply with the King's command to adopt feminine attire for the rest of his life, is to be sought in an abnormal sexual psychology, combined with a craving for notoriety and the hope of escaping by this means from his ever-increasing financial difficulties.

Upon his return to Paris, Beaumarchais, upon his own suggestion, was commissioned by the Comte de Vergennes to resume the negotiations with d'Éon, and he at once left for London bearing an official letter praising the Chevalier's " zeal, intelligence and loyalty," and a solemn undertaking, for his signature, to keep quiet and to let the King hear no more of his scandalous feud with the de Guerchy family. He was also required to give up the papers without more ado, and on these terms he was to be allowed to return to France and to be guaranteed his pension for life. After considerable haggling d'Éon was prevailed upon to accept these conditions, but explained that he had been obliged to hand over the iron chest containing the documents to his friend the English Admiral, Lord Ferrers, as security for a loan of £5,000, which he was quite unable to repay. He gave Beaumarchais, however, the key of the strong box, and with this proof of goodwill in his possession, the negotiator wrote exultingly to Vergennes :

" I place at your disposal, M. le Comte, Captain d'Éon,

a brave officer, an accomplished diplomat, possessing all the virile qualities so far as his head is concerned. He brings to the King the key of an iron safe, securely sealed with my own seal, and containing all the papers it is necessary for the King to recover."

So far, so good. But the Minister of Foreign Affairs, perhaps on the suggestion of Beaumarchais, and as the readiest means of preventing a recurrence of the de Guerchy scandal, now stipulated that since d'Éon was a woman, he should officially declare the fact, and for the future take to feminine apparel.

Beaumarchais was now entrusted with full powers to sign, in the King's name, an unconsciously humorous convention, drawn up by himself, in the form of a treaty between sovereign states, under which "Demoiselle Charles Geneviève Louise Auguste Andrée Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont, spinster, hitherto known by the name of the Chevalier d'Éon, squire, formerly Captain of Dragoons, Knight of the Royal and Military Order of St. Louis, etc., etc. . ." was required "to abandon her disguise, the responsibility of which rests entirely with her relatives, and whilst rendering full justice to the prudent, decorous, and circumspect conduct she has at all times observed in the dress of her adoption whilst preserving a manly and vigorous bearing; I (Beaumarchais) require absolutely that the ambiguity of her sex, which has offered inexhaustible material for gossip, indecent betting, and idle jesting liable to be renewed, especially in France, which her pride would not tolerate, and which would give rise to fresh quarrels that would only serve, perhaps, to palliate and revive former ones—I require, absolutely, I say, in the name of the King, that the phantom Chevalier d'Éon shall entirely disappear, and that the public mind shall be for ever set at rest by a distinct, precise, and unambiguous declaration, publicly made, of the true sex of Charles Geneviève Louise Auguste Andrée Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont before she returns to France, and by her resumption of female attire . . ." and so on, with the other stipulations as indicated above. It is surely one of the strangest documents which has ever found its way into the official archives of any modern state.

When asked how on earth he had come to consent to such a humiliation, the Chevalier said that "Like a drowning man, abandoned by the King and his ministers to the current of a foul river, he endeavoured to cling to Caron's boat." He could never resist a joke.

Accompanied by the ex-dragoon, Beaumarchais now rapidly examined the contents of the strong-box left in the hands of Lord Ferrers, for, as he says, the chest might have contained nothing but "washing bills" for aught he knew. Having satisfied himself on this point, he paid off the alleged mortgage, carefully sealed the papers and despatched them to the King.

There now ensued between the Chevalier, Beaumarchais, de Vergennes, and the King an animated correspondence in which d'Éon sustained the part of a sentimental and querulous but witty old maid with astonishing cleverness, and the reader is tempted to exclaim with Basile, in *The Barber of Seville*: "Who the devil is it they are fooling here: everybody seems to be in the secret!"

To Vergennes, Beaumarchais wrote, "Everybody tells me that this crazy creature is in love with me; who the devil could have thought that in order to serve the King faithfully, I should have to dance gallant attendance upon a captain of dragoons? The adventure seems to me so farcical that I have the greatest difficulty in finishing my report with becoming gravity."

The Chevalier, however, considered that he had not been sufficiently paid, and when he saw that no more money was to be extracted from Beaumarchais, he turned savagely upon him in the English papers, and privately and publicly missed no opportunity of denouncing him. To de Vergennes he reviled him in the most outrageous terms. The former "guardian angel" of an interesting lady in distress had now become "a fool," "a puppy," "a jackanapes," who "could only be compared with Olivier Le Dain, the barber, not of Seville, but of Louis XI." Lastly "He had the insolence," he declared, "of a clock-maker's boy who has by chance stumbled upon the secret of perpetual motion."

With this shrewd and brilliant thrust we take leave of him: he never crossed the path of Beaumarchais again.



THE CHEVALIER D'ÉON DE BEAUMONT.

From the miniature by R. Cosway, R.A. Engraved by T. Chambers, 1787.

[*To face p.* 198.

CHAPTER XXI

THE REHABILITATION OF BEAUMARCHAIS

WITHIN a fortnight of the royal edict which abolished the Parlement Maupeou, Beaumarchais wrote to M. de Sartine :

" I hope you do not wish that I should remain under the obloquy cast upon me by that hateful Parlement which you have just interred beneath the ruins of its honour. The whole of Europe has avenged me for the odious and absurd sentence ; but that is not enough : a decree rescinding that pronouncement is necessary. I am going to work for it with the moderation of a man who no longer fears either intrigue or injustice. I rely upon your good offices in this important matter."

This, however, was only a discreet reminder, for although the sentence had in the meantime become definitive, Beaumarchais was in no hurry for his case to be again brought forward until he had won over the new Minister, M. de Maurepas, for he wanted the sentence annulled, not as an act of grace, but of justice. He no sooner felt that his services had favourably disposed that nobleman towards him than he set to work with his accustomed energy, with the result that on the 12th August, 1776, the King granted him letters patent, extending the time allotted before the decree was made absolute.

The next step was to obtain letters of appeal by writ of error for rescinding the judgment rendered against him. Unfortunately, this action had to come before the Grand Council, which was largely composed of the judges who had been dismissed on the fall of the former Parlement and reinstated in the new.

At this moment Beaumarchais was ordered to proceed to Bordeaux to organize the expedition in aid of the revolted American Colonies of England, to which he had, after persistent efforts, at last obtained the King's grudging consent, under circumstances which we must describe in a future chapter. Before leaving Paris, M. de Maurepas assured him that his presence would not be necessary, and he could set out with his mind at rest. The day after his arrival at Bordeaux with Gudin, he heard that the Grand Council had refused to allow his appeal. Without a moment's delay the travellers dashed back to Paris, and Beaumarchais burst in upon the astonished Minister, exclaiming: "What is this I hear? There am I running to the confines of France to forward the King's affairs, whilst you ruin mine at Versailles!"

"It is only one of Miromesnil's blunders," airily explained Maurepas; "go and tell him I want to have a word with him and return here: we will talk it over together." The matter was soon adjusted and the appeal admitted in a slightly different form.

Then another difficulty arose: the Grand Council was going into recess at the end of August and was not disposed to hear the appeal until the next session. But this delay did not suit Beaumarchais at all. He called upon the Comte de Maurepas, with a carefully drafted letter in duplicate, addressed to the President of the Council and the Attorney-General respectively, all ready for the Comte's signature, urging them as a personal favour to have the case dealt with before the recess, "in order that M. de Beaumarchais might proceed with a tranquil mind on the important mission with which the King has entrusted him." The Comte signed and despatched both letters without demur.

Three days later, Beaumarchais addressed a further letter to M. de Maurepas informing him that M. Séguier, the Solicitor-General, had remarked, on hearing of the steps taken by the Comte to expedite the case, that "such a recommendation would have made him very eloquent in this matter." Beaumarchais concluded by saying: "All I ask, M. le Comte, is for your signature and seal on the enclosed letter, and in a moment my affairs will acquire wings, and to you I shall owe the

recovery, fully three months sooner, of my citizenship, of which I ought never to have been deprived."

The enclosure addressed to the Solicitor-General was in these terms :

"Versailles,
"30th August, 1776.

"I understand, Sir, from M. de Beaumarchais, that unless you do him the favour of speaking on his behalf, it will be impossible for him to obtain judgment until after the 7th September. That part of the King's service in the charge of M. de Beaumarchais will necessitate his almost immediately setting out on a journey ; but he dreads having to leave Paris before recovering his rights of citizenship, and he has suffered so long under this deprivation that his desire in this respect is entirely legitimate. I do not, of course, ask for any favour in the consideration of the appeal itself, but you would oblige me extremely if you could see your way to assist in getting the case heard before the recess."

M. de Maurepas signed, sealed, and despatched this missive as readily as he had done the other.

These wily tactics were completely successful, and on the 6th September, 1776, a decree of the Parlement in full session assembled, revoked the sentence on Beaumarchais, and restored to him his full citizen rights. The verdict was received with enthusiasm by the crowded audience, and the hero was carried shoulder high from the Chamber to his carriage.

He had hoped to deliver a speech which he had carefully prepared for the occasion, but his friends dissuaded him from this course ; so he straightway published it in pamphlet form. In this composition he boldly championed the people's rights, and did not for a moment forget that most of the abuses under the former Parlement persisted in the new. With corrosive irony he attacked the legal procedure of his day, and demanded drastic reform of the judicature. Under his resounding blows, the system began to show the first signs of the vulnerability which was to bring it crashing to the ground in the early

days of the Revolution. But Beaumarchais, intent upon his fight for personal justice, little suspected the tremendous repercussion which these first shocks to authority were destined so soon to produce: the future is hidden even from those who are shaping it.

CHAPTER XXII

BEAUMARCHAIS IN CONFLICT WITH THE PLAYERS

ONE of the greatest difficulties which besets the biographer of Beaumarchais is the multiplicity and the variety of the affairs which occupied his attention at the same time. He had a wonderful power of instantly dismissing a matter from his mind, concentrating on wholly different business, and at any moment turning back to take up the work he was originally engaged upon at the precise point where he had left it. He called this "shutting and re-opening the drawer of an affair."

In spite of the complex and worrying nature of the various transactions engaging his time and energy, he now came forward as the champion of the dramatists, against the greed and sharp practice of the actors and actresses of the Théâtre Français. For the past thirty years the Company of the premier theatre had taken such unfair advantage of the arbitrary and equivocal state of the law regulating the fees due to the playwrights, that some of the leading dramatists of the day, including Sedaine (author of that ever fresh and delightful study of feminine psychology in action *La Gageure Imprévue* and the better known but less attractive *Philosophe sans le savoir*), had been compelled to take his plays to the Comédie Italienne, the company of which were not quite such ruthless exponents of the "skin game." The clause in the regulations which gave the authors such just cause for complaint was that which awarded to the players all future rights in a piece if the receipts taken at a single performance fell below a certain figure.

Although everybody tacitly acknowledges that all things in life are imperfect, few act as though they really believe it, and the fine gentlemen who formulated this extraordinary

rule had clearly failed to make due allowance for human frailty. They soon realized that the players' sense of justice was not perfect, for immediately a piece proved successful, the members of the Comédie Française contrived a performance at which the stipulated amount should not be reached, withdrew it for a time, and revived it after a brief interval, appropriating all the profits. This naturally led to constant and unseemly disputes, which the actors invariably won, now through dividing the ranks of their opponents by gratifying the vanity of the more accommodating dramatists in giving the preference to their pieces, and now by deputing the most seductive actresses of the company, to plead their cause before the Ducs de Richelieu and Duras, the Court officials then in charge of theatrical affairs. These noblemen, however, had long since discovered that the various anomalies in the regulations were not conducive to the quiet enjoyment of their sinecure. The first of these gentlemen was an old man, at this time much worried over the winding-up of a peculiarly scandalous intrigue with a well-known society woman, which had rendered him unusually wary of feminine blandishments. The other was one of those indecisive, ineffectual people, who are always firmly of the opinion of the last person who speaks to them, and waste their powers running hither and thither, like a harassed fowl that knows not where to lay its egg.

Although Beaumarchais had spontaneously made over to the company all rights in his first two plays, the success of *The Barber of Seville* was no sooner assured than they withdrew the piece. This was after the thirty-second performance. Beaumarchais waited upon them for an explanation.

" At a full meeting of the company," he wrote, " one of the actors asked whether it was my intention to give my piece to the Comédie, or to insist on having my royalties. I laughingly replied, like Sganarelle : 'I will give it if I wish to give it, and I will not give it if I do not wish to give it.' One of the leading actors became insistent. 'If you do not give it,' he said, 'at least tell us how many times you wish it to be played before it is allowed to fall under the rules and become our property.'

" 'Where is the necessity that it should belong to you, gentlemen ?'

" 'Many authors make this arrangement with us.'

" 'They are inimitable authors, then.'

" 'They are very well satisfied, sir ; for if they no longer share in the profits of their work at least they have the pleasure of seeing it produced more often. The Comédie always responds to considerate treatment. Do you wish to draw royalties on six, eight, or even ten more performances ? Tell us your views.'

"I thought the proposition so cool," continued Beaumarchais, "that I answered in the same tone : 'Since you wish to know, I ask that it be played a thousand and one times.' "

" 'Sir, you are excessively modest.'

" 'As modest, gentlemen, as you are just. What a mania is this to inherit the goods of those who are not dead ! As my piece can belong to you only by the receipts falling to a very low figure, you ought rather to wish that it should never belong to you. Are not eight-ninths of a hundred louis more desirable than nine-ninths of fifty. I see, gentlemen, that you love your own interests better than you understand them.' I laughed and bowed to the assembly, which gave me an answering smile, as its orator was observed to colour slightly."

The Duc de Richelieu, tired of the continual quarrels, which interfered with the quietude so congenial to a voluptuary of advancing age, welcomed the intervention of Beaumarchais, then probably the richest man of letters of his time, for he knew he could rely on his impartiality since he was better liked by the actors than by his fellow authors. The Maréchal, therefore, invited him, on behalf of the dramatists, to endeavour to come to some satisfactory arrangement with the players, and report to him. Having provided himself with a letter from the Duc, Beaumarchais waited upon the company, requesting to be allowed to examine their books. This was indignantly refused. At this rebuff, the negotiator felt considerable hesitation as to the next step he ought to take, for he was loath to upset the cordial relations which had hitherto existed between the players and himself. Moreover, his hands were so full of other matters that he was not eager to add to his responsibilities ; but on the urgent solicitation of several of his less fortunate colleagues, and not

wishing to be robbed on his own account, he sent in a claim for an exact statement of the amount due to him. Thereupon, Desessarts, who had studied law before becoming an actor, was deputed by the company to sound Beaumarchais as to his intentions, and to proffer 4,506 livres, which they declared was the amount of royalties due on the first thirty-two performances of *The Barber*. As the delegate brought no statement, Beaumarchais sent the money back. Three days later he sent another claim for a statement of account. After a fortnight's delay, they sent him an unsigned memorandum. This also he returned, pointing out that his demand was reasonable and insisting on having a properly certified account. The players replied that this was impossible.

" A perusal of the obliging letter," wrote Beaumarchais, " signed by several of your members, with which you have honoured me, confirms me in the opinion that you are all upright people eager to do justice to the authors, but that, like all men more practised in the fine arts than in the exact sciences, in dealing with figures, you allow your imagination to create bogies and entanglements which any person with the least method would solve without difficulty." He then proceeded to initiate the company into the mysteries of book-keeping. But all his wit and aplomb went for nothing, and the players intimated their intention of taking legal advice on the matter. Beaumarchais reported this failure to the Duc de Richelieu, who referred him to his colleague the Duc de Duras, who referred him back again to the Duc de Richelieu. The latter put his foot down and refused to be disturbed. Beaumarchais next determined to get the dramatists together in the hope of formulating a common policy. To this end he invited all who had had one or more plays performed to dine with him and discuss their position. This was not so easy as it looked, for the authors had been used to fighting single-handed, some were old and apathetic, and some were jealous of each other, and yet others were even then engaged in acrimonious and long-standing quarrels.

The first to respond were the three Academicians Saurin, Marmontel, and La Harpe. The two former writers accepted the invitation without difficulty, but La

Harpe excused himself from attending on the ground that he never dined out, but that he would come after dinner, adding, however: "I ought to warn you that if M. Sauvigny or M. Dorat are likely to be present I shall not come. You are too much a man of the world to expect me to hob-nob with my declared enemies."

Beaumarchais endeavoured to soothe the irascible Academician and induce him to forget his personal animosities for the common good, as he had already invited the writers in question, who had accepted with alacrity. But the eminent critic proved implacable, and Beaumarchais was obliged to dispense with his collaboration for at least the first sitting. Like most contentious people La Harpe had acquired an undeserved reputation for intellectual honesty; but contentiousness is more often a sign of ill-breeding or bad temper than sincerity.

Collé also sent excuses. He was not in Paris, he said, and even if he had been he would have to confess, "with my usual frankness, that I could not have had the honour of being present. I am old and disgusted to the point of nausea with the delightful royal troupe. God send us another! For the past three years I have met neither comedians nor comediennes:

De tous ces gens-là
J'en ai jusque-là.

"Nevertheless, sir, I wish your project every success; but permit me to confine myself to good wishes. If any man other than yourself were at the head of the enterprise I should doubt of its success; but you, sir, have proved to the public that to you nothing is impossible! I have always thought that you did not care about anything that was easy. I came to this conclusion on seeing the hardihood you have displayed in making our gentle nation laugh in spite of itself, for hitherto it has been willing only to weep over the theatrical representation of virtues it has no intention whatever of emulating."

We have heard the author of *Dupuis et Des Ronnais* speaking, "with his usual frankness," in quite another tone of the author of *Eugénie;* but Beaumarchais had now, clearly, become a man whom it was well to conciliate.

The next person to be approached by the indefatig-

able champion of authors' rights was a star of greater magnitude. But Diderot, the hero of a hundred fights, preferred to leave the conduct of the new campaign to the younger and more energetic men.

"So there you are, sir," he wrote, "at the head of an insurrection of dramatic poets against the players! . . . As for me I pass my time in the country as much a stranger to the affairs of the town as forgotten by its inhabitants. Allow me to confine myself to prayers for your success. While you do the fighting, I will lift up my arms towards Heaven on the heights of Meudon. May the men of letters who deliver battle to the players owe to you their independence!

"But to tell you the truth, I very much fear that it will be harder to get the better of a troupe of comedians than of a Parlement. Here ridicule will not have the same force. Never mind! your effort will be none the less just and none the less honourable. I greet and embrace you."

Beaumarchais succeeded in assembling twenty-three writers at the first meeting, and an executive committee was appointed, consisting of himself as president, Sedaine, Saurin and Marmontel. But even the preliminary difficulties were by no means at an end, for whilst the players presented a united front, the authors had scarcely met before disagreements broke out amongst them, and the solution of the problem seemed almost as far off as ever. Only those who have seen the mass of correspondence on this subject can form any conception of the magnitude of the founder's labours.

The question was not definitely settled until the 13th January, 1791, when the Constituent Assembly accepted in principle an author's exclusive control over the products of his pen, and to the end of his life Beaumarchais continued to act as the jealous guardian of the rights which he had done more than any other to establish. As Sainte-Beuve justly remarked: "The Society of Dramatic Authors ought never to meet without saluting the bust of Beaumarchais." The members of to-day have an opportunity of paying such tribute, for a fine bust of the founder, by H. Allouard, now occupies the place of honour in the Assembly Hall of that influential Society.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH BEAUMARCHAIS CLOSES HIS ACCOUNT WITH THE COMTE DE LA BLACHE

EIGHT years had passed since the Comte de la Blache had plunged Beaumarchais into a sea of troubles, from which he had emerged, like the son of Thetis from the Styx, invulnerable—or, at any rate, as invulnerable as it is given any mortal to be—for battling in the flood, which threatened at any moment to engulf him, had taught Pierre Augustin one of life's most valuable lessons: to hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and play the hand which Fate deals out to you calmly to the end.

The judgment rendered against him was revoked by the Grand Council at the end of 1775, and the case referred to the Provençal Parlement for a final hearing. The decisive conflict between Beaumarchais and the most obstinate of his adversaries took place, accordingly, at Aix in July, 1778. Having stolen a march on his opponent (who was busy preparing for the American expedition), the Comte deluged the country with copies of a pamphlet in which he had the hardihood to maintain that Beaumarchais had never been on familiar terms with Pâris Duverney. The document, full of contradictions, misstatements and falsifications, was written in the tone of an exceedingly arrogant nobleman dismissing a fraudulent and insolent valet. The Comte was well known in the province, whilst his adversary was a stranger, and whatever may be said to the contrary, the eighteenth century French commoner loved a lord as dearly as the average Englishman is reputed to do. The Comte de la Blache used his credit, both as a noble and as a rich and distinguished soldier, to influence public opinion in his favour, and tried to induce all the barristers of the Provençal Parlement to support his memoir with their signatures,

hoping by this means to deprive his enemy of legal assistance. This design was frustrated by several members of the Bar refusing to participate in such an irregular procedure. The Comte, thereupon, caused a copy of his memoir to be delivered at every house in the neighbourhood. By an unfortunate oversight a copy was handed to Beaumarchais personally at his attorney's house, where he had taken up his quarters with Gudin. He was not slow to make use of this blunder, and the ensuing dialogue between him and the messenger provided him with a sufficiently comic opening for his *Réponse Ingénue*, which, needless to say, is not so artless as its title implies. It begins thus:

"A breathless and heated colporteur knocks at my door, and hands me a memoir, with these words: 'M. le Comte de la Blache begs you, sir, to interest yourself in his case.'

"'Do you know who I am, my good fellow?'

"'No, sir; but that doesn't matter in the least: there are three of us running from door to door, and our instructions are not to forget even the convents and the shops.'

"'I am not inquisitive, my friend, thank you.'

"'Oh! sir, do take one: I am so loaded! There are so many people who refuse them!'

"'Very well, then!—and here are eight sous for your trouble and your present.'

"'Faith! sir, it is not worth it!' He is still on the run, and as for me, I close my door."

In the course of this pamphlet Beaumarchais does not spare the rod, and pleasantly compares Duverney with the excellent Alworthy in *Tom Jones*, whilst the Comte, of course, is cast for the rôle of Blifil. The result of this preliminary encounter was to turn public opinion completely in his own favour.

Meanwhile, Beaumarchais, accompanied by the inseparable Gudin, was the life and soul of every company in which he happened to be, and conducted himself as though he had not a care in the world. He was much run after by women, and several society ladies in difficulties of every kind sought his advice and help. Among these was Mme. de Saint-Vincent, a great granddaughter of Mme. de Sévigné, who, though a complete

stranger, addressed a witty but brazen letter to him from her prison in the Conciergerie. This was the lady whose misconduct was then causing such intense anxiety to that ancient reprobate the Duc de Richelieu, who accused her, with good reason, of taking advantage of her position as his mistress to indulge in a series of fraudulent financial transactions, in which she attempted to involve her former lover. Fearing that the relations between the Duc and Beaumarchais were connected with her own case, she wrote to the famous pamphleteer, begging him not to join her enemies by placing his dreaded pen at their service. His reply, setting her mind at rest as to his intentions, complimenting her on her literary gifts, but plainly hinting that he was shocked by the flippancy of her tone, so ill-suited to her deplorable situation, deserves high rank as an example of epistolary art. From this time also dated a voluminous correspondence with a girl of seventeen, who is always discreetly referred to as "Ninon." She belonged to a well-known family in Aix. A precocious and enthusiastic study of Rousseau and too close an application of his incendiary sophistries, whilst developing her extraordinary literary ability, had resulted in social consequences of the most embarrassing kind; and her object in writing to Beaumarchais was to seek his assistance in bringing her faithless and reluctant lover to the altar. Although the parties to this amazing correspondence never met, Beaumarchais, in spite of the urgency of his business, found time to reply to her at regular intervals, never failing to give her sound and badly needed counsel.

The Comte de la Blache, alarmed at seeing his popularity on the wane, now launched another memoir, urging that the pamphlets of his opponent should be burnt by the public executioner, on the grounds that they were blasphemous and disrespectful to the King. The document was signed by six prominent lawyers. Nor was this all: the exasperated nobleman spent day after day in interviewing the judges, and, indeed, everybody who was likely to have the slightest influence on the public mind.

Gudin says that Beaumarchais "thought it very improper for a litigant to visit the magistrates trying his case, to slip prejudices and invectives into their ears, and to tell them things in secret which they would not dare

avow in public." For his part he refused to stoop to such unscrupulous courses, for he had every confidence, he insisted, in the justice of his cause and in the uprightness of the judges ; that his adversary had less faith in their integrity filled him with indignation : it is always hard to forgive others for lacking our good qualities. To those who urged him to greater activity, he answered in the words of *Le Misanthrope :* " Have I not a good case ? " However, he lost little time in bringing out his reply, which in allusion to his own isolation and the number of lawyers arrayed against him, he entitled *Le Tartare à la Légion.* Turning first to the charges of impiety levelled against his first pamphlet, he asks : " What can there be in common between religion and our lawsuit ? What ! Can it not be stated and proved that the Comte de la Blache is a slanderer without offending Heaven ? And if I do not succeed in proving it, what has that got to do with religion ? If I am wrong, are not the means of punishing me in the hands of the magistrates ? Is not that sufficient without dragging Heaven and earth into our quarrel ? " . . . " Even the greatest saints," he continues, " never believed that they could be offending God in their writings when they ridiculed the Devil and those who showed such efficiency in carrying out his evil works. . . . Why all this fuss, this clamour, this frenzied running hither and thither ? Why can you not leave me alone ? " he cries, " and I would not say a word : my emblem is a drum which makes a noise only when it is beaten."

Passing on to the accusation of disloyalty, he writes : " Because His Majesty has said in a decree in Council that he would treat with the utmost severity of the law those who misused their wit to defame persons with whom they were in controversy, do you really think, M. le Comte, the King meant that he would accord his royal protection to those who defamed their adversaries provided they did so without wit ? What a precious title to protection and favour you invoke ! Because your pleadings are dull and stupid, do you think you have the right to make them outrageous and slanderous with impunity ? It is proved up to the hilt that they are so, and people laugh at and despise you because of them ; therefore, you think you have the right to invoke the royal authority to avenge

this offence by carefully preserving your writings while delivering mine to the flames ! "

This pamphlet still further increased the popularity of Beaumarchais, and he now suggested to the magistrates that he and the Comte should plead their cause personally at one audience of the Court. This was agreed to, and the rivals appeared in a crowded assembly and addressed the magistrates in turn. They both made eloquent speeches. The Comte conducted his case with ability, but he was unable to efface the deep impression created in all minds by his opponent's statements. After fifty-nine sittings, the magistrates decided unanimously in favour of Beaumarchais. They ordered Duverney's will to be executed, and condemned the Comte to pay all costs of the lawsuit and damages amounting to twelve thousand livres, whilst his pamphlets were stigmatized as slanderous, and condemned to be suppressed. The magistrates intimated that they would have allowed higher damages to Beaumarchais had it not been for what they considered the unseemly truculence of his pamphlets, and on this account they ordered him to pay one thousand livres to the poor of the town. He at once paid into Court double that sum.

The judgment was received with enthusiasm by the public, and the hero was fêted everywhere. As for the Comte, much to the surprise of Beaumarchais, he accepted the judgment like a man and a philosopher, and presented his successful rival with a portrait of his grand-uncle Duverney, which he knew Beaumarchais had always greatly admired.

Thus ended this epoch-making lawsuit, which had precipitated an apparently all-powerful Parlement into the abyss, shaken French society to its foundations, awakened public opinion for the first time to consciousness of its strength, and fixed the attention of the whole country on the chief actor in this astonishing drama. By a marvellous combination of courage and dexterity Beaumarchais had succeeded in enlisting the tastes, ideas and passions of the moment in his own favour. He had overcome all obstacles, broken down all barriers, swept aside all rules, denied every authority, attacked all laws, and pushed to the utmost limits that subversive critical spirit which always marks the dawn of a new era.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH BEAUMARCHAIS DISCOVERS AMERICA

IN 1775 France, still smarting under the humiliating conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, imposed upon her twelve years before, watched with sympathetic interest the struggle of the American Colonies for independence; but most people anticipated that the rebellion would be easily suppressed. The author of *The Barber of Seville* thought otherwise, and we have seen how closely he studied the situation whenever the King's affairs took him to London. He can, indeed, fairly claim to be amongst the few Frenchmen (if not the first) to foresee the triumph of the Colonies. He was not the sort of person to keep his ideas to himself, and he never missed an opportunity of insinuating them into any report or statement which he happened to be supplying to the King or his ministers. He was more than once snubbed for his pains. It is easy to condemn them for their lack of vision. Yet no man welcomes the unsolicited advice of an amateur in the conduct of his affairs, and still less when it is proffered at the point of an epigram.

But Beaumarchais was not to be turned aside by rebuffs, however well merited and however crushingly administered. He was so pertinacious that King and ministers at length got so tired of him that they let him have his way, this seeming to be the only means of keeping him quiet. It was decided to send a confidential agent to England to report directly to the King on the situation, and Beaumarchais had little difficulty in convincing the Government that they could not possibly find a person better suited to the post than himself, especially as, since his sojourn in Spain, he was on intimate terms with Lord Rochford* (now Secretary of State for the southern department); he added that this nobleman was

* Rochford was one of the few persons mentioned with approval in the *Letters of Junius*.

an expansive person and that he had the art of making him talk. It will also be remembered that Beaumarchais was the friend of Wilkes and was well known in Opposition circles. As it happened, the chief objection to his selection for this post was the notoriety which pleased him so much, for immediately he landed, and unknown to himself, a watchful eye was kept on all his movements, as is evident from two letters, among the Abergavenny MSS., from Sir S. Porten to John Robinson, of a rather later date.

"The noted Beaumarchais," says the first of these documents, "is now in London. I could easily find him out, if it were thought expedient to do anything with him. *Private. Read by the King.*"

The second is even more explicit, and is dated two days later :

"Beaumarchais goes by the name of M. Laval. His avowed business is to treat with the noted Morande, and prevent the publication of some work ; but it is said that he has been in the City to deal in the stocks. I have set two men to watch him. His changing his name here seems a matter sufficient to detain him as a spy and impostor. The French are doing all they can to work up the Dutch, Danes and Swedes, to maintain the honour of their flags."

So much for the boasted secrecy of his movements.

On the pretext, then, of bringing the transactions with the Chevalier d'Éon to a conclusion, Beaumarchais was again in England, accepting the lavish hospitality of his friends and doing his utmost to confound their politics. He was not the father of Figaro for nothing. Early in September we find him addressing to the King a detailed and perspicacious confidential report on the progress of the quarrel between the Colonists and the Metropolis, in which he affirmed with confidence the complete victory of the Americans in the near future, but only on condition that they received secret help from France. He employed all his adroitness and dialectical skill in urging Louis to adopt his plan, for, as he pointed out, if the insurgents were defeated, their resentment against His Majesty's Government would be such that they would certainly unite with the English and turn against the French, who were unprepared for war. In such an event the French sugar islands

would fall an easy prey to the new combination. He implored the King to seize every opportunity of prolonging the struggle, and his project of giving the rebels secret help was a perfectly safe way of achieving this end.

His first memoir being ignored, he submitted a second and more urgent report a few weeks later, and at last the prudence and circumspection of M. de Vergennes and the timidity of Louis gave way before the persistent and insinuating advances of their irrepressible agent. The King secretly authorized Beaumarchais to draw arms and munitions from the State arsenals, on condition that he afterwards replaced them, and that he undertook all risks of transport across the Atlantic. He was to provide ships and men, and was to reimburse himself by shipping cargoes of tobacco, rice and indigo, which the Americans would supply in exchange for the munitions and equipment.

In June, 1776, the King advanced to him one million livres, for which Beaumarchais gave a receipt, dated the 10th of that month, and in August the Spanish Government was induced to associate itself with the enterprise by transmitting a similar amount to the newly appointed hidden intermediary. Beaumarchais at once augmented these funds from his private resources, and with a few rich partners founded an enormous trading company, Rodrigue Hortalès and Co., to carry out this half-political and half-commercial undertaking. The conditions governing these transactions were agreed upon between Beaumarchais and Silas Deane, who had been sent to Paris by Congress with full power to procure the desperately needed help.

As so often happened, even in the most serious undertakings of Beaumarchais, a comic interlude enlivened the preparations for his first convoy. An old doctor named Dubourg, one of Franklin's closest European friends and an enthusiastic supporter of the American cause, had for long meditated a similar project to that of Beaumarchais, and had already approached M. de Vergennes on the matter. Upon hearing that he had been supplanted by the author of *The Barber of Seville*, he wrote to the Foreign Minister to the following effect :

"MONSEIGNEUR,—I saw M. de Beaumarchais this morning and willingly conferred with him. Everybody is

acquainted with his wit, and nobody appreciates more than I do his integrity, discretion and zeal for all that is noble and of good report. I believe him to be one of the men best fitted for political negotiations, but at the same time among the least suited for commercial transactions. He loves display ; I am informed that *he keeps women ;* he is said to be a regular spendthrift, and there is not a merchant or manufacturer in France but regards him as such and would hesitate to do business with him. I must say that he astonished me very much when he told me that you had charged him, not only to aid us with his counsels, but had committed into his hands alone the details of all commercial operations, consignments, munitions of war, and the ordinary trading between France and the united Colonies, and between the former and her own Colonies, the direction of all business, the fixing of prices, the making and carrying out of contracts, etc., etc. I agreed with him that this arrangement might possibly result in greater secrecy, but I urged that the taking over of every branch of this immense traffic, to the absolute exclusion of everybody else, was grossly unfair to those who had put themselves to great expense and for over a year had tired themselves out and encountered great dangers and difficulties in the service of Congress. He thereupon exerted his eloquence to prove to me, by hook or by crook, that the arrangement made with him would not interfere in any way with the transactions of others. I admit that all personal considerations should give way before the urgent need for secrecy in the present critical conjuncture ; but I may be allowed to doubt if there are not other and perhaps better means of ensuring this necessary end. There are perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand persons in France who, although their talents may be very inferior to those of M. de Beaumarchais, could better carry out your wishes by inspiring more confidence in those with whom they would have to deal."

Who shall say that the doctor was wrong in his deductions ? Is it so unreasonable to maintain that the man who breaks faith in one human relationship cannot be implicitly trusted to observe the moral code of another ? Can we safely assume that he who is capable of running

away with another man's wife will be more scrupulous about making off with his money, if tempted to do so ?

The grave M. de Vergennes was so much amused by Dubourg's letter that he showed it to Beaumarchais, not forgetting, we may be sure, to rally him on the matter of keeping women. Beaumarchais answered the doctor, forwarding a copy of his letter to the minister for his entertainment :

"This Tuesday, 16th July, 1776.

"Until M. de Vergennes showed me your letter, Sir, it was impossible for me to grasp the exact meaning of the communication with which you honoured me. . . . What does it matter to our business whether I am an ostentatious fellow, with many irons in the fire, and even whether 'I keep women' or not ? The women I have kept for the past twenty years, Sir, are your very humble servants. There were five of them, four sisters and a niece. Three years ago, to my great grief, two of these kept women d'ed. I now keep only three—two sisters and a niece—which is certainly rather ostentatious for a man in my position. But what would you have thought if, knowing me better, you had been aware of the fact that I had pushed the scandal so far as to keep men as well—two very young and quite good-looking nephews, and even the unlucky father who brought into the world such a scandalous keeper ? As to my ostentation, that is worse still. Three years ago, thinking that laced and embroidered clothes were too shabby to suit my vanity, have I not had my sleeves ornamented with the finest plain muslin ? The finest broadcloth is not too fine for me ; sometimes even, when it was very hot, I have been known to push my snobbery to the point of wearing silk ; but I beg of you, Sir, not to write about these things to M. de Vergennes, or you will entirely ruin me in his estimation.

"You have, doubtless, had your reasons for writing ill of me, whom you do not know, and I have mine for not being offended with you for doing so, although I have the honour of knowing you. You are, Sir, an estimable man, so inflamed with the desire of accomplishing a good work that you thought you could permit yourself to do a little ill in order to procure an opportunity of doing it.

"This is not quite the morality of the Gospel, but I have seen many people adopt it. It was in this same sense that the Fathers of the Church, in order to convert the heathen, sometimes allowed themselves to make hazardous citations, and to circulate holy slanders, which they named among themselves pious frauds. Let us cease jesting. I am not angered, for M. de Vergennes is not a small-minded man, and I am content to abide by his decision. If those of whom I ask advances in business mistrust me, it cannot be helped; but let those who are animated by a genuine zeal for the cause of our common friends think twice before they estrange an honourable man, who offers to render every possible assistance and to make all kinds of advances to these same friends. Now do you understand me, Sir?

"I will do myself the honour of calling upon you this afternoon before the close of your meeting. I have also the honour of being, Sir, your most humble and most obedient Servant, well known under the name of Rodrigue Hortalès and Co."

The worthy doctor never quite forgave Beaumarchais, especially as disaster speedily overtook the single small ship which he succeeded in equipping and dispatching to America with a cargo of munitions, with a view of securing a load of merchandise in exchange. Within a few days of leaving port, the vessel had the ill-luck to sail into the midst of the English Fleet, and was promptly seized and confiscated as contraband.

Meanwhile the enthusiasm and ability of Beaumarchais overcame all obstacles, and in a surprisingly short time he was able to deliver to the insurgents 200 guns with a sufficiency of projectiles, 25,000 muskets, and the entire equipment for 25,000 troops. These supplies arrived just in time, and, indeed, made possible the campaign of 1777. A dense crowd of people assembled on the shores of Portsmouth Roads to welcome the flotilla of Beaumarchais, consisting of the *Amphitrite* and two smaller ships, the hard-pressed Colonists shouting and clapping their hands with joy at this unexpected and timely aid.

In rendering such signal service to the cause of the new Republic, however, Beaumarchais had strained his

credit to the utmost, and he naturally counted upon the insurgents promptly fulfilling their obligations to him, as their agent had promised. But having for the present secured what they wanted, they suddenly discovered that they had no confidence in Beaumarchais, and professed to see in him merely the secret intermediary of the French monarch for transmitting to them the munitions as a free gift. They refused to believe his statement that his entire private fortune was involved in making this decisive contribution to the success of their armies in the field. In this view they were confirmed by the ambitious and disappointed Arthur Lee, who did his best to obscure the issue out of resentment against Silas Deane, who, he considered, had usurped his position as principal agent in this matter. He knew it was characteristic of Beaumarchais always to keep a watchful eye on his own interests whilst working for the good of others, and he found it an easy task to foster in the American leaders doubts of the justice of the Frenchman's claims, especially as it was then impossible for M. de Vergennes to support them. Beaumarchais undoubtedly owed this unpleasantness to his unfortunate reputation as an intriguer, for the past is always the most living thing in the present. But, however this may be, it is impossible to exonerate the Americans from the charges of ingratitude which he brought against them. It may be remarked, in passing, that Dubourg's letter, above quoted, furnishes a strong presumption against the justice of the American attitude, whilst it also reflects fairly accurately the misgiving with which many business men regarded this irruption of Beaumarchais into international commerce.

In spite of his urgent representations that unless they fulfilled their engagements without delay he and his associates would be ruined, the insurgents for long refused to send anything in exchange, and when at last a cargo of merchandise did reach France, it was held up by Lee and Franklin on the grounds that it did not belong to Beaumarchais. The American sage profoundly distrusted the free and easy Frenchman : his gaiety shocked his austerity. Some people are so constituted that their consciences are a nuisance to themselves and to everybody around them. Franklin was one of these, and his reports

on Beaumarchais to Congress were partly responsible for the Americans' excessive caution. It was only with great difficulty that the republican agents could be induced to hand over the cargo. As a consequence of these tardy and inadequate returns, Beaumarchais was, in July, 1777, compelled to report to his partners a deficit of over three million livres, and it was only a further advance of one and three-quarter millions by M. de Vergennes which saved the company from collapse.

The zeal of Beaumarchais, however, was proof against the ungracious conduct of the Colonists and the thousand and one difficulties which beset him. On the contrary, when he heard that the Baron de Steuben, one of the officers he had sent across the Atlantic, had distinguished himself, and been appointed Inspector-General of the insurgent troops, he wrote to his New York agent Théveneau de Francy (younger brother of Morande):

"Bravo! Tell him I regard the glory he has won as the interest on my money, and I have no doubt that on this score he will bring me heavy returns."

Again later, when Francy reported to him that he had granted a heavy loan to Lafayette when in difficulties with the money-lenders, he warmly approved his action with the remark:

"What a fine young fellow he is! It is a privilege to be able to oblige such an officer." All of which goes to show that in his American enterprise he was not actuated so entirely by motives of self-interest as many would have us suppose.

Six months later, when the prospects of the House of Hortalès had brightened, Beaumarchais purchased from the State an old warship called the *Hippopotame*, and after rechristening it the *Fier Rodrigue*, refitted it from stem to stern, armed it with sixty-six guns and thirty-three smaller pieces, loaded it with a cargo of military equipments, and placing it under the command of a distinguished officer, M. de Montaut, prepared to launch it towards America. All was ready, and the ship was on the point of sailing, when an urgent message came through

M. de Maurepas from the King, nervous at the threatening attitude of the English, expressly forbidding the delivery of the cargo of the *Fier Rodrigue* and those of its convoys to the Americans. Beaumarchais readily promised to abide by the royal decision. He assured the anxious minister that his vessel was not bound for New York, but to the French Colony of St. Domingo, with a detachment of seven or eight hundred recruits for the Militia. He quite understood how necessary it was to allay the suspicions of the English. If M. de Maurepas would leave it to him, he would see that nothing went wrong, and that the English were duly hoodwinked. He would arrange for Congress to send two privateers to seize the *Fier Rodrigue* when off the island. The captain would protest against the capture, and after a convenient delay, Congress would release the ship, with apologies for an unfortunate error of judgment. Meanwhile it would have discharged its cargo and loaded another of tobacco in exchange. "In this way," explained Beaumarchais, "M. de Maurepas would be relieved of his promise to those to whom he had made it, and I should be released from mine to him." Figaro himself would not have reasoned otherwise.

Louis, face to face once more with the daring and obstinacy of Beaumarchais, who had succeeded in galvanizing de Vergennes and de Sartine into activity, at last gave way, as he had so often done before, and on the 13th March, 1778, he notified the English Government that he had decided to recognize the United States, which, of course, was equivalent to a declaration of war.

The embargo on the sailing of the *Fier Rodrigue* was now removed, and the vessel at once set out with a convoy of ten ships belonging to the fleet of Beaumarchais. When off the coast of Grenada the flotilla was sighted and summoned to heave to by the French fleet, under the command of the Comte d'Estaing, who was about to join battle with the English under Admiral John Byron, the grandfather of the poet and the companion of Anson in his voyage round the world. The *Fier Rodrigue* was ordered to take up a position in the line, and the warship of Beaumarchais bore a gallant part in the ensuing French success. But its captain was killed, its masts broken,

its hull riddled with shot, and the ten convoys, which it had been compelled to abandon to their fate, were either taken or lost.

But the renown that his ship had won consoled Beaumarchais in some measure for this Pyrrhic victory, and he was immensely gratified by d'Estaing's neatly turned letter of thanks for his services. His vanity was still more flattered when the King bestowed upon him a congratulatory smile on a lively song, "*Quand Biron veut danser*," which he had written to celebrate the occasion. After some delay the Government indemnified him for the losses he had incurred, which were estimated at two million livres, of which amount he now drew four hundred thousand livres—the last instalment being paid to him six years later, in 1785, just in time to save him from bankruptcy.

Beaumarchais was not a philanthropist. He had taken up this colossal enterprise because he thought he could make money over it, and when his hope was not realized and creditors began to worry him, he pressed his claim on Congress with increasing vigour, M. de Vergennes supporting him by declaring "that the King had not supplied them with anything, but had simply permitted M. de Beaumarchais to draw supplies from his arsenals on condition that he replaced, within a reasonable time, everything that he took." For the elucidation of this part of the American negotiations, M. Jules Marsan's book *Beaumarchais et les affaires d'Amérique : Lettres inédites*, is of considerable importance. Eight months after the declaration of M. de Vergennes, on the 1st January, 1779, Congress directed the following letter to be sent to their chief French champion :

"Sir,

"The Congress of the United States of America, sensible of your exertions in their favour, present you with their thanks and assure you of their regard.

"They lament the inconvenience you have suffered by the great advances made in support of these States. Circumstances have prevented the compliance with their wishes, but they will take the most effectual measures in their power to discharge the debt due to you.

"The liberal sentiments and broad views which alone could dictate a conduct like yours are conspicuous in both your actions and your character. While with great talents you serve your Prince, you have gained the esteem of this infant Republic, and will receive the united applause of the New World.

"By order of Congress."

"Their united applause" was, in fact, the only thing he ever did get from them.

After another wearisome interval of silence Congress dispatched letters of credit for 2,544,000 livres, but payable in three years' time, and destined for the liquidation of the current account. The most important letter amongst those published by M. Marsan is one which Beaumarchais wrote to damp the enthusiastic congratulations of Francy when forwarding these documents, pointing out to him that a delay of three years rendered these letters of credit unnegotiable in Europe, and that, with such a reservation they were worth the paper they were written on and no more. This last evasion really annoyed him, and he wrote to the President of the new Republic: "A people which has become sovereign and powerful may perhaps look upon gratitude as a private virtue beneath the dignity of politics, but nothing excuses a State from being just and, above all, from paying its debts." But Congress, having heard of the assistance that M. de Vergennes had rendered to Beaumarchais, persisted in regarding him simply as an intermediary. They even adopted a report presented by Arthur Lee, stating that, so far from Beaumarchais being the creditor of the Assembly for 3,600,000 livres, as he claimed, he was in reality its debtor to the amount of 180,000 livres. Beaumarchais was duped. But though he now ceased to deal with Congress direct, he continued to do business with the separate States of Virginia and South Carolina, and in this trade realized a very fair profit.

He was destined never to see the end of this unlucky speculation. It vexed and embittered the rest of his life, and it was not until 1835, thirty-six years after his death, that his daughter, Mme. Delarue, journeyed to Washington,

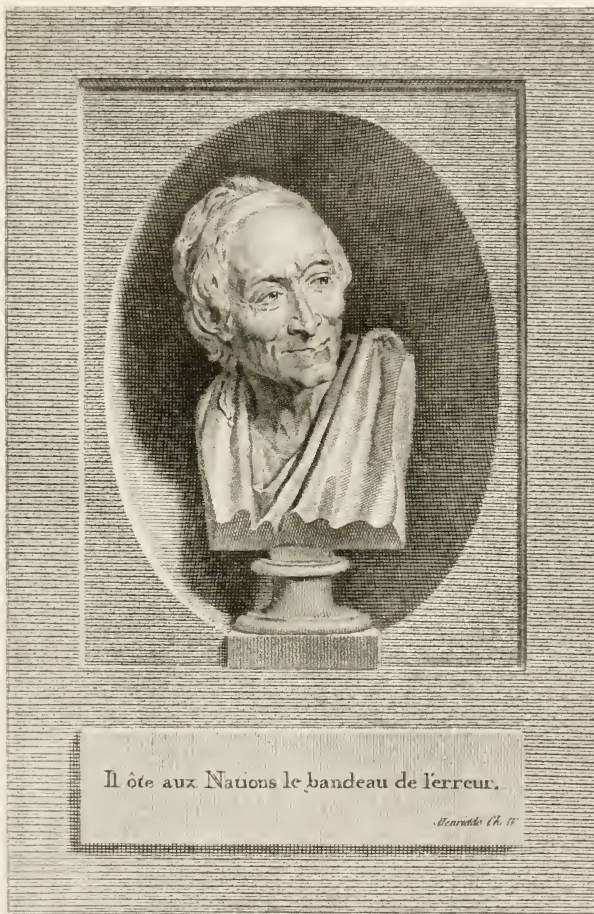
with her son, to plead her cause in person. Congress at last offered a sum of 800,000 francs in full payment of the debt, which it had, in 1779, estimated at 2,544,000 livres. Weary of this eternal correspondence, Mme. Delarue accepted the terms offered.

CHAPTER XXV

BEAUMARCHAIS AND VOLTAIRE

OWING to the combined and implacable hostility of the Church and the Law, at least half of the works of Voltaire were prohibited in France, but their circulation was not only tolerated, but often approved and encouraged by those entrusted with State affairs. Most of the banned volumes were readily procurable, the Ministers occasionally salving their consciences by ordering an edition to be seized and burnt and its vendors imprisoned. Under these circumstances, at the time of the patriarch's death in 1778, no bookseller had been found willing to undertake the grave personal and financial risk of issuing a complete edition of his works. A year after the Master's death, however, Panckoucke, the bookseller, bought the unpublished MSS., with a view of remedying this omission. But his courage failing him at the last moment, he approached Beaumarchais, suggesting that he should undertake the perilous but honourable enterprise. In spite of the multiplicity of his engagements, Beaumarchais soon became fired with enthusiasm for the project, and sounded M. de Maurepas on the subject. The old Minister, a thorough-going Voltairean, thought the scheme an admirable one and promised to give it his secret support.

With such encouragement in high places, Beaumarchais determined to proceed with the greatest publishing venture then on record. His first step was to announce the foundation of *The Philosophical, Literary and Typographical Society* (" I am the Society," he explained in a confidential letter), and that he himself had been duly elected General Secretary. At a price of 160,000 francs he acquired the Panckoucke MSS.; sent an agent to England to purchase the famous Baskerville type for 150,000 livres,



VOLTAIRE.

From a drawing by J. M. Moreau le jeune, after the statue by Houdon.

[*To face p.* 226.

and another to Holland to study the manufacture of paper ; bought three paper mills in the Vosges, and searched every frontier for a neutral territory where he could safely establish an enormous printing works. After a piquant correspondence, too long to quote, he leased for this purpose from the Margrave of Baden a disused fort at Kehl, and at once started the work of adaptation and equipment of the premises.

These preliminary matters being settled, he publicly announced to prospective purchasers his intention of publishing two beautiful editions of the Master's works, including his correspondence, in seventy volumes 8vo, and ninety-two volumes 12mo, respectively, in an edition of 15,000 copies. The work of supervising the manufacture of the paper, the printing, binding and distribution of this vast publication, and of devising means of smuggling the sets wholesale into France—with the connivance, it is true, of M. de Maurepas and other powerful patrons, but still subject to the constant danger of confiscation and ruin—sometimes tried to breaking-point even the dauntless spirit of Beaumarchais. "Here am I," he cried on one such occasion, "obliged to learn the A B C of paper-making, printing and bookselling!" But he was an apt pupil: he soon acquired a working technical knowledge of the business in all its branches, enabling him to discuss every detail by correspondence with his manager at Kehl—and his profound knowledge of human nature did the rest. His works manager was an able but touchy and disagreeable young man, with rather extravagant ideas, named Le Tellier, whose peculiarities were a constant source of worry and trouble to his chief in Paris. On the 10th of March, 1780, for instance, Beaumarchais had occasion to address him a letter to this effect :

"When I write to you, my dear fellow, it is just as if I was speaking to you. My style is coloured by my feeling, and you ought to answer me as though we were conversing together. It has never been my intention to reproach you with negligence, but perhaps with trying to undertake too much. . . . If we do not resolutely reject all side tracks we shall never be ready in time. How, for instance, do you suppose that we can safely promise to have an edition

ready in the early months of 1782 when in March, 1780, we have still to equip the paper mills, to found the type, set up the presses, and engage the workmen ? A year has gone by and we have hardly begun.

"Your number 3 sample of paper is very poor, and printed on such stuff it would be an imposition to sell the volumes at six francs each. If, whenever difficulties arise, you are content to fall back on the second best, you will find yourself offering to a discontented public a very inferior edition, and I confess that this fear seizes me, even in the midst of the promises I am making to everybody and the hope which warmed my heart of achieving a fine thing—this fear of the middling, I say, empoisons my life. This is a wretched paper for the 8vo edition ; on such thin, rough material the characters will be utterly wanting in grace, and the booksellers, already sufficiently annoyed with us for dispensing with their services, will overwhelm us with public sarcasms and reproaches. I confess that I should be hard put to it for a reply. I cannot so easily be satisfied with the less as soon as I see the difficulty of giving more. . . . I cannot be a party to such a deception of the public. After being led into this enterprise through my confidence in your knowledge and ability, do not let me break faith with the public ; if you do, you will empoison my whole life, which had no need of books to be honourable, and I should be grieved that the only fruit of the friendship with which you have inspired me should turn to such bitterness for me. . . . Everybody is convinced that you cannot possibly complete the work in less than four years.

"It is bad to keep people waiting, but it is a hundred times worse to keep them waiting for a middling article.

"And now, having stated all my fears, I turn to encouragement. Never be satisfied with mediocrity, for it is that which everybody is on the look-out for. Do not allow yourself to be beguiled by uncertain little hopes : take a clear line in everything. In this way you will know exactly where you are, for, I tell you frankly, I will never be a party to mediocrity."

Le Tellier's harsh and overbearing manner to his subordinates was another perpetual source of trouble,

and workmen were constantly leaving Kehl and returning to Paris bitterly complaining of his conduct. Things came to such a pass that on the 21st March, 1781, Beaumarchais was constrained to address him a letter which does infinite credit to his patience, amiability and understanding :

"The people of Kehl," he wrote, "seem to me to be very incensed against you. This is often enough to ruin the most promising undertaking. I have no doubt that you are always strictly in the right, but in my opinion your rough tongue and unbending attitude often estrange from you those whom a little more kindness would conciliate. However much I prize your zeal and your talents, it seems to me that you often fail in the art of keeping your assistants, and, since you cannot do everything yourself, this is a grave matter. Do you know that I have not received a single letter, since you took over the *Voltaire*, which does not contain some complaint against you, whether the communication comes from Paris, London, Deux-Ponts or Kehl! In fact, I am being attacked from every quarter. It is impossible not to conclude that, with the best intention in the world, you are alienating everybody by your curt, disdainful bearing, which is offensive to ordinary people, who always judge a man by the side he turns to them. You will tell me that it is not your fault if you have such incompetent assistants ; but I reply that, taken in the mass, men are the same everywhere ; that everywhere businesses are being conducted with assistants no better and no worse than those you employ ; and that, generally speaking, all the complaints made against you are on account of your air of disdainful superiority, which puts everybody's back up. It was unbending haughtiness of this kind which has just brought about the downfall of M. Necker. A man may have the very greatest talents, but directly he attempts to sell his superiority to his subordinates at too dear a price, he will make them all his enemies, and everything will go to the devil, without its being anybody's fault. . . . What I would have you conclude from this is that moderate, circumspect, and always careful of the susceptibilities of others, I may at least serve you as an

example of how to deal with men, and it would be desirable that everybody could say of you what I am determined you will always be able to say of your servant and friend,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

It took Beaumarchais three years to get this undertaking into full working order. Apart from the tribulations described above, there were endless editorial difficulties to be surmounted. When the ten volumes containing the Master's correspondence, for instance, were all printed and bound, Catherine the Great of Russia made energetic representations to the French Government to compel Beaumarchais to suppress certain of her letters, with the result that Beaumarchais was ordered to send her proofs and cancel every sheet which failed to meet with her approval. All such sections of the work had to be reprinted and the volumes rebound. The Empress repeatedly promised to indemnify him for the great loss incurred, but Beaumarchais never succeeded in inducing her to keep her word.

The work of collation of the MSS., annotation, commentary and revision was entrusted to Condorcet. Beaumarchais himself retired modestly into the background, and notes from his pen are few, but full of piquancy. Such was the comment on Voltaire's letter to M. d'Argental, at the time of the Goëzman lawsuit :

"A hasty, ardent and excitable man like Beaumarchais," wrote the philosopher, "might box his wife's ears, or even box the ears of his two wives, but he does not poison them."

To which the General Secretary appends the note :

"I certify that this Beaumarchais, like most men who have loved them much, has sometimes had his ears boxed by a woman, but has never been guilty of the ignominy of raising his hand against any one of them."

It was in 1783 that the first volumes began to appear, and the publication was not completed till seven years later. Beaumarchais baited his hook with a lottery for 200,000 francs, open to the first four thousand subscribers, and although he secured only two thousand subscriptions, the drawing took place in due course. In a letter, dated



DUMOURIER

From a lithograph by Delpech, after a drawing by Hesse.

[*To face p.* 230.

the 1st September, 1790, thanking M. d'Ogny, Postmaster General, for his continual good offices, Beaumarchais confesses to a loss of over a million livres in capital and interest, but consoles himself with the thought that he has more than kept faith with the public, and has been the means of providing Europe with a not unworthy edition of the Master's works.

One gratifying result of this undertaking was the renewal of the publisher's long-standing friendship with Dumouriez. At the time of the Chaulnes affair the future Commander-in-Chief had severely condemned his friend's conduct in not calling his adversary out. He was not then aware of his imprisonment, and his trenchant and ill-informed criticism had led to their estrangement. But Dumouriez, who was an affable person, had long seen that his impetuosity had betrayed him into doing his friend an injustice, and in subscribing for the edition of Voltaire, wrote to Beaumarchais, handsomely acknowledging his offence, and begging him to overlook the error of judgment which had led to his very natural resentment.

Needless to say, Beaumarchais was delighted to welcome his old friend back, and they became more intimate than ever.

This record of blind confidence, prodigality and ruinous miscalculation shows that Beaumarchais was a hardy speculator, but does little to establish his claim to any great business capacity ; and it may well be that such considerations furnish the most satisfactory explanation of the extreme wariness of the Americans in dealing with him.

CHAPTER XXVI

ABOUT "THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO"

THE attitude of an artist towards his work is that of a fond mother towards her nursling. No sacrifice on behalf of the beloved is too great: he has often been known to give his blood, his health and all that he has to bring the child of his imagination to light. Like a mother, he loves to tend his darling night and day: to dress and undress it; he is never happy out of its sight; he bores his friends by retailing its merits, and, in his heart, resents criticisms, however tactfully offered. He is ever ready to engage in acrimonious quarrels on its behalf; and all for the sake of a little thing which the world will perhaps pass over in silence, or with the cold phrases of conventional commendation. An odd creature, truly!

Of *The Marriage of Figaro* it was justly said that "more wit was required to get it upon the stage than to write it." During the height of the success of *The Barber of Seville*, in 1775, the Prince de Conti publicly expressed the opinion that the preface was gayer than the piece itself, and challenged its author to turn it into a comedy. Beaumarchais accepted the wager by writing *The Marriage of Figaro*, which was completed in 1778, and originally called *La Folle Journée*. The new play was not offered to the Théâtre Français company until three years later, because at the time of its completion the author was still in conflict with the actors. During these years Beaumarchais carefully worked over the MS., pointing an epigram here, sharpening a malicious allusion there, and, above all, ruthlessly deleting those passages in the conventionally florid manner often to be found in his earlier work and not entirely absent from *The Barber of Seville;* for, like most writers as they grow older in the practice

of letters, he had become concerned less and less with style, and more and more with life and ideas; and, indeed, is not a fussy preoccupation with style commonly the sign of either the novice or the pretentious mediocrity? When a critic reproached him for the loose phraseology of his dialogue as being "unworthy of his style," he replied: "My style, sir!—if by bad luck I had one, I should force myself to forget it when writing a comedy, for I know of nothing more insipid than fine writing in a theatrical composition."

Immediately an understanding with the players had been reached, the new comedy was submitted to the company, and was received with acclamation. Beaumarchais thereupon hastened to request the Minister of Police, M. le Noir, to appoint a censor to examine the work. The official to whom this duty was referred read the comedy, and, after making a few deletions, to which the author was able to agree, approved and recommended it for the King's sanction. All now seemed plain sailing. But the eagerness of the artist to read the play to his aristocratic friends spoilt everything. He read it to a large company in Paris, and to another at Versailles. He repeated the indiscretion in the house of the Maréchale de Richelieu and in that of the Princesse de Lamballe, and neither of these exemplary ladies saw in it anything offensive. In order to give an air of intimacy to the occasion, he introduced the reading by a preface in which he wittily compared himself to a coquette, eager to accord the favour which she at first refuses and ends by granting, although she knows the fate which inevitably follows the surrender. After this gay preamble, he declaimed the comedy from a fine MS., ornamented with pink ribbons.

Then one day he shut up the MS., and firmly refused all requests to read it again. The public curiosity, once aroused, increased daily. He adroitly made an exception in favour of the Grand Duke Paul of Russia and his Duchess, then on a state visit to Paris, and hinted that if he were refused a hearing in Paris he would encounter no such difficulty in St. Petersburg, for the future Emperor and his suite listened to the reading with the greatest interest, and expressed their admiration with enthusiasm. This determined the King to judge the play for himself,

but having had it read to him, he declared it to be "detestable and unpresentable." This, of course, amounted to a formal prohibition. Baffled on one front, Beaumarchais delivered a flank attack. He turned for support to the courtiers, the very people whom he had most unmercifully ridiculed in his comedy. "Only little people fear little books," says Figaro in the play, and nobody dared resent his raillery for fear of being taken for a person of mean intelligence. Almost to a man they arrayed themselves on the side of the banned playwright. Every member of that genteel society apparently discovered in this audacious comedy shots which hit his friends and acquaintances so much harder than himself that, like Mr. Shandy on a similar occasion, he felt "'twas a relative triumph, and put him in the gayest humour in the world."

By his astute strategy Beaumarchais had now inflamed the curiosity of Court circles to such a pitch and had brought such powerful influence to bear that at last he obtained permission for the play to be performed in the Théâtre des Menus-Plaisirs. Actors and actresses were word-perfect and all was ready, when a formal order came from the King again prohibiting the performance. The reason of this new check is said to have been that at a house-party given by the former Minister Amelot, the host said to Beaumarchais : "What will prevent your comedy from being performed is that the King will always oppose it," and that he flippantly replied : "Oh ! if that is all, it will be played !" The truth is not for all ears.

After a further interval, M. de Vaudreuil himself obtained permission for a private representation at his Château de Gennevilliers, when his guests were to include the King's brother, the Comte d'Artois, and the Queen's favourite, the Duchesse de Polignac. It was now the turn of Beaumarchais to become coy. The objections which had been raised to its performance, he said, had inspired him with serious doubts as to the propriety of his comedy, and he feared that some parts of it might offend such noble ears. Before consenting to the request of M. de Vaudreuil he must stipulate that a fresh censor be appointed to examine the work, and, in the event of his report being favourable, that M. le Comte would use his



From an engraving by Levasseur, after the portrait by Duplessis.

[*To face p.* 234.

influence to secure the raising of the ban upon the performance of the play to the general public. A new censor was, accordingly, detailed to read the MS., and, under the circumstances, could scarcely fail to be accommodating, for few were anxious to cross the wishes of men and women of rank and fashion. With a few minor alterations, the piece was approved, and was received by a large and distinguished audience with the greatest enthusiasm. The little theatre was overcrowded, and the heat so stifling that in order to air the hall Beaumarchais broke one or two panes of glass with his cane, which caused it to be said that "he had broken the windows twice over."

Powerful influence was now brought to bear by several members of the audience to persuade the King to reverse his decision, and M. de Vaudreuil and the Duchesse de Polignac prevailed upon Marie Antoinette to speak in favour of its performance in public. Four more censors were thereupon appointed to scrutinize the comedy, making six in all. Only two declared against it, of whom Suard alone unequivocally condemned it. The King was at last persuaded that nothing was to be feared from the writings of a gay fellow like Beaumarchais, and that in any case it would be sure to fail. When this dictum was repeated to Sophie Arnould she said: "Yes, but a hundred times in succession?"

Beaumarchais immediately took advantage of the King's confident expectation by getting the play produced with the least possible delay, in case Louis changed his mind again.

The Marriage of Figaro was first played publicly at the Théâtre Français on the 27th April, 1784. Never had there been such a scene. The competition for tickets was the keenest that had ever been known, and a piece of calculated impertinence on the part of the author added to the zest. The President Dupaty had addressed to him the following note:

"It is very kind of you to send me a ticket for a box, but I very much doubt if I can use it, as I must go to your *Figaro* with some persons who regard it with suspicion and have their reasons not to be seen there, that is to say (for I owe you a clear explanation), with a mother and her

daughters. If then the box is not one of those on the ground floor, where one cannot be seen, your ticket is of no use to me. I should, however, be glad if you would in this case change it for a lower box ticket, for there are many people who ask nothing better than to show themselves. Lastly, I send you back the ticket, and beg you to give me the pleasure, the very great pleasure of arranging things to the satisfaction of these ladies. With the friendliest greetings, I am, etc."

The reply of Beaumarchais, which was widely circulated, and created a great scandal—its offensive tone drawing a sharp criticism from Horace Walpole among others—was couched in these terms :

" M. le Président," he wrote, " I have no consideration for women who permit themselves to see a spectacle which they believe to be improper, provided that it is done in secret. I will not lend myself to such fancies. I have given my piece to the public for their amusement and instruction, and not to afford strait-laced fools the pleasure of thinking well of it hidden in a box, on condition that they are allowed to speak ill of it in society. Such is the prudery of the age that people want to have the pleasures of vice whilst retaining the honours of virtue. My piece is not an equivocal work : you must either take it or leave it. I salute you, and keep my box."

In view of the fact that the friendship between the two men had always been of the most cordial nature, and remained so to the end, and knowing our man, we are inclined to think that the episode was an ingenious, as it was a highly successful, piece of advertising.

At eight o'clock in the morning a vast queue had formed outside the theatre. All the adjacent streets were completely blocked. The greatest lords and ladies in the land flocked to the performance. Three persons were said to have been suffocated in the crush—" one more than for Scudéry," as La Harpe slily remarked. Society ladies shut themselves all day long in the actresses' dressing-rooms, dining with the players, in order to make sure of their places.

And all that these people flocked to see was a former barber turned valet, befool, ridicule and scoff at a member of their order in the person of the Count Almaviva, or, as Gudin neatly phrased it, "to see an insolent valet shamelessly disputing his wife with his master." Beginning at five-thirty, the curtain rang down on the performance at ten o'clock, the longest theatrical representation then on record. Never had there been such a success.

Yet of all French writers of rank, Beaumarchais is the least correct. His work is frequently marred by two opposite faults—verbosity and a mania for concision leading to downright obscurity. He is always liable to deplorable errors of taste, nor is he free from the inherent defect of all writers of the epigrammatic school—a poverty of emotion uncommonly like heartlessness. He is utterly devoid of reverence and humility. He is inferior to Le Sage in intensity and power of expression, to Marivaux in charm of style and presentation, to Regnard in exuberant inventiveness, and to Sedaine in moral quality and constructive skill; yet, in our opinion, the character of Figaro places him definitely above all these dramatic writers, for here he has created a universal type, has endowed him with an indestructible vitality, and has exhausted the possibilities of the type, so that no future writer can make an intriguing valet the central figure of his work. In imaginative literature, this faculty for creating vital characters and putting into their mouths memorable observations about life is, we think, the one unmistakable sign of quality; and judged by this standard Beaumarchais is inferior only to the greatest, for, having once made the acquaintance of Figaro, we are as little likely to forget him as we are Falstaff or Tartufe, Don Quixote or Gil Blas, Sam Weller or the Abbé Coignard. The creation of this comic giant, in fact, must ever remain the chief claim of Beaumarchais to immortality.

It may perhaps here be convenient to outline the plot of this comedy.

Figaro, concierge of the Château of Aguas-Frescas, had borrowed 10,000 francs from Marceline, waiting-woman in the same mansion, and had given her a written promise to repay the loan within a given time or to marry her. Being, however, deeply in love with Suzanne, the Countess of Almaviva's maid, he is about to marry her. The match

is forwarded by the Count, for he himself has designs on Suzanne, and thinks that by promising her a dowry she will be willing to allow him the feudal seignorial right over her, which he had already formally renounced in order to gain the good-will of his vassals. This little domestic intrigue is conducted on the Count's behalf by the unscrupulous Basile, music master at the Château. But the faithful Suzanne, who ardently returns Figaro's love, informs her mistress and her lover of the Count's unwelcome attentions, whence arises an understanding between these three to frustrate my lord's designs. Meanwhile, Chérubin (the direct literary forbear, by the way, of Louvet's Faublas), page to the Countess, and beloved by everybody in spite of his precocious and mischievous pranks, has on several occasions inadvertently surprised the Count in his philanderings with his vassals, and has thereby incurred his animosity. The nobleman at last, finding himself baffled at every turn, but without understanding how it has been done, determines to avenge himself by favouring the claims of Marceline. Finding himself unable to seduce the young servant, he resolves to teach Figaro a lesson by marrying him to the old one. As chief magistrate of the province of Andalusia he orders Figaro and Marceline to be brought before him, and, having heard the case, condemns Figaro to marry her the same day or repay the 10,000 francs. This scene is obviously introduced to give Beaumarchais an opportunity of holding his own judges up to ridicule and contempt. At this moment it is discovered that Figaro is the long-lost son of Marceline and our old friend Bartholo, of *The Barber of Seville*. The Count is naturally furious. Meanwhile, the Countess, who still cherishes the hope of bringing her husband back to her by putting him in a false position, has arranged that Suzanne shall pretend to grant the Count a secret meeting at night in the garden, but that she herself, disguised as her maid, shall keep the appointment. Unhappily for him, Figaro hears of the favour granted by his intended bride. Overwhelmed with grief and jealousy, he conceals himself in the garden in the hope of spoiling the fête. His misery is still at its height when he is agreeably surprised to find that he had himself blundered into the trap which had been set for the Count, and accepts with his habitually gay

philosophy the blows which the indignant Suzanne showers upon him for daring to doubt her integrity. He now enters whole-heartedly into the plot to expose the Count's faithlessness, and at last Almaviva, finding himself, in the presence of his assembled vassals, hopelessly in the wrong, throws himself on his knees and begs his dear Rosine's pardon. The Countess smilingly forgives him and Figaro marries Suzanne. "That is all : the lightest of intrigues, as you see," airily explains the author. Stated in this way the comedy sounds harmless enough, yet it was the most daring, the most confident announcement of the coming Revolution.

Beaumarchais was singularly happy in his choice of artists to interpret his characters. His theatrical instinct was not at fault when he chose the popular but very middling tragedienne Mlle. Sainval for the part of the Comtesse, she proved an excellent comedienne ; and still less when he entrusted that of the gracious Suzanne to the then almost unknown Mlle. Contat, whose charming and vivacious personality captivated all hearts. Mlle. Olivier, a fresh and lively English girl of seventeen (who died the following year), was equally pleasing as Chérubin. Dazincourt brought all the wit and subtlety of a great comedian to the interpretation of the complex and ironical Figaro ; whilst Molé played the part of Almaviva with grace and distinction. Old Préville amused the audience as Brid'oison, but the comic possibilities of the part were only fully brought out when he retired in favour of Dugazon, whose stammering tongue and clever "make-up" kept the whole house in an uproar of merriment whenever he made his appearance.*

The unprecedented success of the comedy again set the enemies and detractors of Beaumarchais in a ferment, and a deluge of scurrilities in prose and verse was showered upon him, whilst the implacable Suard went out of his way to attack him at a full sitting of the Academy, and continued the feud with bitterness in the *Journal de Paris*. In one of these articles he sneeringly asked what had become of the little Figaro, mentioned in *The Barber of Seville*, but not referred to again. Beaumarchais at once

* See Mantzius (K.), "History of Theatrical Art," Vol. vi. 1921, pp. 106–110.

replied that, coming to France some years ago, she had married a workman in the Porte Saint Nicolas quarter, named Lécluse, who had just been killed in an accident, leaving her in penury, with two children in arms. He ended by appealing to his enemy to join him in helping the unhappy widow. To counter Suard's malice, Beaumarchais had seized on a genuine case in which he was at the moment interesting himself, hoping to involve his adversary in a charity. Suard's only response was to attack him more than ever. At last, goaded beyond endurance, Beaumarchais declared to the publishers of the *Journal de Paris* that in future he did not propose to reply to anonymous insults. He would have done well to end there, but he concluded, "Having had to conquer lions and tigers to get my comedy played, do you imagine that, after its success, you will reduce me, like a Dutch servant, to beat out the vile insect of the night in public every morning?" Unhappily for Beaumarchais, the Comte de Provence, afterwards Louis XVIII., had secretly taken part in the dispute against him, and Suard, stung by that part of the antithesis obviously intended for him, avenged himself by insinuating in the proper quarter that the other part was aimed at the King and Queen. Louis was at the card-table when the matter was reported to him, and it made him so angry, says Arnault in his *Souvenirs d'un Sexagénaire*, that, without rising from his chair, he pencilled upon the back of a seven of spades an order for the immediate arrest of Beaumarchais, and, adding insult to injury, commanded him to be conveyed to Saint Lazare. Thus, on an accusation dictated by spite and tittle-tattle, one of the richest and most celebrated Frenchmen of his time, author of the two wittiest comedies since Molière, whose work was even then adding lustre to the French stage, found himself, at fifty-three years of age, in a prison till then reserved for depraved and incorrigible youths.

At first Paris laughed heartily over the enormity of the ineptitude, as it is apt to do on such occasions, but soon the public became restless and clamoured for the victim's prompt release. Five days later he was politely requested to leave the prison, which he at first refused to do until he had been accused and judged. It was not often that Louis XVI. had to repent of hastiness, but his good sense

soon convinced him that he had been betrayed into putting a false construction on the phrase used by Beaumarchais, and he almost begged the protesting victim of his irritability to allow himself to be liberated. A few days later he gratified the injured author by intimating that orders had been given for a performance of *The Barber of Seville* at the model Court Theatre of Trianon, at which the Queen would play the part of Rosine, the Comte d'Artois that of Figaro, and M. de Vaudreuil that of Almaviva, and inviting him to attend. "Surely," as Grimm says, "no more delicate or flattering amends could be made to Beaumarchais for the affront which had been put upon him."

The contrite Louis further ordered the last and most considerable instalment of the indemnity for the loss of his merchant fleet to be paid over to the head of the firm of Rodrigue Hortalès and Co., merchant adventurers.

CHAPTER XXVII

"THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO"

FEW writers ever made more consistent use of the creatures of their imagination for the propagation of their views of the world, the flesh and the devil than Beaumarchais. As we attach considerable importance to the Figaro plays as a revelation of the mind and a commentary on the life of their author, we cannot do better, we think, than follow the plan adopted when dealing with *The Barber of Seville*, by furnishing the reader with a rough translation and summary of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The comedy opens in a half-furnished room in the Castle of Aguas-Frescas. Figaro, the factotum, is busy measuring the walls, whilst Suzanne, my lady's maid, stands before a mirror putting on her head the traditional circlet of orange blossom known as the bride's chaplet.

Figaro. Nineteen by twenty-six!

Suzanne. Tell me, Figaro. Does my chaplet suit me better so?

Figaro (taking her hands). Incomparably, my charming one! Oh! how sweet to a husband's loving eye is this pretty virginal bouquet on a beautiful girl's head on her wedding morn!

Suzanne (withdrawing her hands). What are you measuring there, my boy?

Figaro. I was just seeing whether the fine bed which the master has given us would go well here.

Suzanne. In this room?

Figaro. He has given it up to us.

Suzanne. Well, I won't have it!

Figaro. Why not?

Suzanne. I won't have it!

Figaro. But why not ?

Suzanne. I don't like it.

Figaro. But, surely you can give a reason.

Suzanne. What if I do not wish to do so.

Figaro. Oh ! how sure of us they are !

Suzanne. To prove that I am right would be to agree that I might be wrong. Are you my servant, yes or no ?

Figaro. You take a dislike to the most convenient room in the castle. It is between the two apartments. If my lady is taken ill during the night, she will ring the bell on her side : hop ! in two steps you are with her. If my lord wants anything, he has only to sound his, and, jump ! in three bounds I am there.

Suzanne. I dare say ! but one fine morning, when he has rung his bell and packed you off on a long errand, hop ! in two steps he is at my door, and, jump ! in three bounds——

Figaro. What *do* you mean ?

Suzanne. You must listen to me quietly.

Figaro. Good God ! what is it ?

Suzanne. The fact is, my dear, that Count Almaviva, tired of courting the beauties about here, wishes to go back to the castle, but not to his wife ; it is upon yours (do you understand ?) that he has cast his eyes, and he hopes that this lodging will do no harm to his prospects. And this is what the loyal Basile, the honest agent of his pleasures and my noble singing-master, repeats to me every morning when giving me my lesson.

Figaro. Basile ! my fine fellow, let me only get hold of you !

Suzanne. So you really thought, my poor boy, that this dowry he is giving me was a reward for your services ?

Figaro. I had done enough to hope so.

Suzanne. How stupid clever people are !

Figaro. They say so.

Suzanne. Yes, but nobody will believe it.

Figaro. That is where everybody is wrong.

Suzanne. Learn, then, that his design is to obtain of me secretly a certain quarter-of-an-hour alone—an ancient seignorial right . . . you know what I mean, and how shameful it is.

Figaro. I know it so well that if the Count, on marrying,

had not formally abolished this shameful right, I would never have wedded you in his domains.

Suzanne. Well, then, if he has abolished it, he repents having done so, and it is from your bride that he seeks to buy it back secretly to-day. . . .

Figaro. Ah! if only I could think of a way of trapping this arch deceiver and pocketing his money!

Suzanne. Intrigue and money: that is just your sphere. . . .

On Suzanne leaving him Figaro encounters Dr. Bartholo and Marceline, and after a little joking at their expense passes on his way. When they are alone, Marceline tells the doctor that the Count neglects his wife and is in active pursuit of Suzanne. She then reminds him of his promise many years ago to marry her, but since he seems indisposed to do so, she begs him to help her to marry Figaro, and thus enable her to escape from the unwelcome attentions of Basile, for, she remarks, "even the most adventurous woman hears a voice within her which says: 'Be beautiful if thou canst; good if thou wilt; but be respected you must.' So since every woman feels the absolute necessity of being respected, let us try Suzanne by divulging the secret offers which have been made to her." Suzanne, she argues, will be so ashamed that she will continue to refuse the Count's proposals, who will avenge himself by forwarding her own designs upon Figaro.

At this point Suzanne enters, and there is a sharp but excessively polite passage at arms between the two women over Figaro, and they part with double-edged compliments.

Chérubin now accosts Suzanne.

Chérubin. Ah! Suzon, I have been watching for the last two hours to find you a moment alone! Alas! you are going to be married, and I am going away!

Suzanne. Why should my marriage be the cause of my lord's first page going away?

Chérubin (tearfully). Suzanne, he has dismissed me!

Suzanne (mimicking him). Chérubin! some fresh folly.

Chérubin. He found me yesterday evening with your cousin Fanchette, with whom I was rehearsing her part for the fête this evening. He got so angry when he saw

me! "Get out, you little ——" I dare not pronounce in the presence of a woman the bad word he used. "Get out! and to-morrow you shall not sleep in the Castle." If my lady, my beautiful godmother, does not succeed in appeasing him it is all up with me, Suzanne. I shall for ever be deprived of the happiness of seeing you.

Suzanne. Of seeing me? Now it is my turn! So it is no longer for my mistress that you secretly sigh!

Chérubin. Ah, Suzon! How noble and how beautiful she is! But how imposing!

Suzanne. That is to say I am not, and that with me you can dare——

Chérubin. You know, little wretch, that I dare not dare. But how happy is your lot! To see her at all times, to speak to her, to dress her in the morning and to undress her at night . . . pin by pin. . . . Suzon, I would give—— What have you in your hand?

Suzanne (teasingly). Alas! the happy bonnet and the thrice happy ribbon which every night confines the hair of that beautiful godmother!

Chérubin. Her ribbon! Give it to me, sweetheart.

Suzanne. Certainly not! "Sweetheart," quotha! How familiar he is! If it were not that he is an insignificant little brat—— (Chérubin snatches away the ribbon.)

Chérubin (running behind a chair). You can tell her you have mislaid it; spoilt it, lost it. Tell her what you like.

Suzanne (running after him). I predict that in three or four years' time you will be a thorough little good-for-nothing. Give me back the ribbon!

Chérubin (drawing a song from his pocket). Let me keep it. Do let me keep it, Suzon, then I will give you my song, and whilst the thought of my beautiful mistress will sadden all the days of my life, yours will shed over them the only ray of light which can still gladden my heart.

Suzanne (snatching the song from him). Gladden your heart, you little rascal! You think you are talking to your Fanchette; you are surprised with her; you sigh after my lady, and you tell me the tale into the bargain.

Chérubin. It is true: on my honour I don't know

what is the matter with me, but for some time past I have become so agitated, and my heart beats furiously at the sight of a woman; the words *love* and *bliss* make it leap and grow troubled. In fact, the need to say to somebody "I love you" has become so urgent that I say it aloud to myself running in the park, to your mistress, to you, to the clouds, to the wind, which carries away my vain words. Yesterday I met Marceline. . . .

Suzanne. Ha! ha! ha! ha!

Chérubin. Why not? She is a woman. She is single! A girl, a woman! What sweet names! How interesting they are!

Suzanne. I believe he is going mad!

Chérubin. Fanchette is kind-hearted; she does at least listen to me. Not like you.

Suzanne. Diddums! Now listen to me, sir. (She tries to snatch away the ribbon.)

Chérubin (turning and running away). Ah! no! I will part with it only with my life—see! But if you are not satisfied with the price I will throw in a thousand kisses. (He chases her in his turn.)

Suzanne (running away). A thousand smacks if you come near me! I shall complain of you to my mistress; and, far from asking pardon for you, I myself will tell my lord: "It serves him right, my lord. Drive the little villain away. Send the little rascal back to his parents, for he makes eyes at my lady, and tries to kiss me into the bargain."

Chérubin (seeing the Count enter, throws himself, in his alarm, behind an armchair). I am lost!

Suzanne. What a fright you gave me!

The Count draws Suzanne towards him, soothes her and tries to make love to her, but she indignantly rejects his advances. He is interrupted by Basile's voice, shouting for Figaro, and immediately hides behind the armchair, Chérubin slipping out just in time and concealing himself in an easy chair standing near by. Basile renews his insidious proposals to Suzanne on behalf of the Count. He accuses her of encouraging Chérubin to make love to her.

Suzanne. What a lie! Leave me this instant, you wicked fellow!

Basile. I am wicked because I keep my eyes open. Was it not for you that he wrote the song of which he makes such a mystery?

Suzanne (angrily). Yes, for me. . . .

Basile. Unless, of course, he composed it for my lady. In fact, when he serves at the table they say he makes such eyes at her! But he had better look out. If he is found playing that game he will find my lord is an ugly customer to deal with!

Suzanne. And you are a great scoundrel to go about spreading such stories to ruin an unhappy boy who has fallen into disgrace with his master.

Basile. Did I invent it? I merely repeat what everybody is saying.

The Count (getting up). What's this? Everybody is speaking about it?

Suzanne. Oh, heaven!

Basile. Ha! ha!

The Count. Be quick, Basile, and turn him out of the house!

Basile. How sorry I am to have intruded. . . .

Suzanne. My God! my God!

The Count. She feels faint. Let us put her in this easy chair.

Suzanne. I won't sit down. How dare you come into my room in this free and easy way: it is shameful!

Count. There are two of us with you, my dear. There is no longer the least danger.

Basile. I am dreadfully upset to have made merry over the page, since you overheard me: I spoke so only to find out what she thought about him, for really . . .

Count. Give him fifty pistoles, a horse, and send him straight back to his parents.

Basile. My lord! merely for a joke . . .

Count. He is a little libertine: only yesterday I surprised him with the gardener's daughter.

Basile. With Fanchette?

Count. In her room.

Suzanne (exasperated). Where, doubtless, my lord also had business.

Count (gaily). I rather like that remark.

Basile. It is a good sign.

Count. However, you are wrong ; I was looking for your uncle, my drunken gardener, to give him some orders. I knocked ; they were a long time opening. Your cousin looked very embarrassed ; this made me suspicious. I spoke to her, and whilst talking I looked about me. Behind the door there was a kind of curtain. . . . Pretending to be unconscious of what I was doing I gently, very gently, lifted the curtain (in imitation of his gesture he lifts the dress which Suzanne had thrown over the chair to conceal Chérubin) . . . and I saw (he sees the page) . . . Oh !

Basile. Ha ! ha !

Count. This trick is as good as the other.

Basile. Better.

Count. Splendid, miss ; no sooner betrothed than you start these sort of arrangements ? Was it to welcome my page that you wanted to be alone ? And you, sir, show no signs of amendment ; without regard to the respect that you owe to your godmother you make advances to her maid, the wife of your friend ! But I will not allow Figaro, a man whom I respect and love, to be the victim of such deception. Was he with you, Basile ?

Suzanne (angrily). There is neither deception nor victim ; he was here whilst you were speaking to me.

Count. I hope you are lying. His worst enemy would not wish him such a misfortune.

Suzanne. He came to ask me to persuade my lady to plead for his pardon. He was so frightened at your entrance that he hid himself in this chair.

The Count, convinced that they are lying to him, becomes increasingly angry, and ends by telling Suzanne that she shall not marry Figaro.

At this moment a deputation of servants, peasants and village girls, headed by Fanchette, wait upon the Count, who is now joined by his wife. Figaro, the spokesman (to the Count's infinite embarrassment), slyly but eloquently pays tribute to his clemency in waiving the right which has been such a constant source of vexation and heart-burning to his tenants. The speech is greeted with hearty applause. The Countess takes advantage of the general good feeling to beg Almaviva to pardon Chérubin. This he agrees to do, and gives him a commission in his

regiment, on condition that he set out forthwith to take up the appointment.

In the next scene, Figaro observes Chérubin's disappointment at having to leave before the fête, and, thinking that he may perhaps be useful, tells him to make a pretence of departure and to conceal himself till the evening, and when the entertainment is over promises to make his peace with the Count.

The second act opens with a conversation between the Countess and Suzanne, in which the latter relates to her the episode of the ribbon and of the Count's advances to herself. The Countess betrays some jealousy of her husband and is touched by the devotion of the page. The pair resolve to warn Figaro and seek his advice to frustrate Almaviva's project of marrying him to Marceline.

On Figaro's entry Suzanne cries :

" My dear, do be quick ! My lady is so impatient !

Figaro. And what about you, my little Suzanne ? My lady has no cause for worry. Besides, what is it all about ? The merest trifle. The Count finds our young wife attractive : he desires to make her his mistress : it is only natural.

Suzanne. Natural ?

Figaro. So he nominates me Special Messenger, and Suzon Counsel to the Embassy. He knew very well what he was about.

Suzanne. When will you have done ?

Figaro. And because Suzanne, my betrothed, will not accept the appointment, he intends to favour the designs of Marceline—what could be simpler ? Avenge ourselves upon those who upset our plans by overthrowing theirs : everybody does that—that is what we are going to do. Well, that's all !

Countess. Figaro, how can you treat a matter which so nearly concerns the happiness of us all with such flippancy ?

Figaro. Who said that, my lady ?

Suzanne. Instead of sympathizing with our sorrows. . . .

Figaro. Is it not enough that they are engaging my

attention? Now, let us act as methodically as he does, and first of all, let us cool the ardour of his pursuit of our belongings by making him uneasy about his own.

Countess. That is easily said, but how?

Figaro. It is already done, my lady: a faked warning about you. . . .

Countess. About me! You must be losing your senses!

Figaro. Not at all. It is he who is going to lose his senses.

Countess. Such a jealous man too! . . .

Figaro. So much the better; to circumvent people of that sort it is only necessary to whisk up their blood a little, as women know so well how to do; then, when they have got them red in the face, with a little management they can lead them by the nose wherever they like, even into the Guadalquivir. I have given Basile a letter, on the quiet, from you, which will warn my lord that an admirer will be on the look-out for you during the ball to-night.

Countess. Is it thus that you trifle with the truth respecting an honourable woman?

Figaro. There are very few, my lady, with whom I would dare it—for fear of being right.

Countess. He expects me to thank him into the bargain!

Figaro. But you must own it is pleasant to have cut out his work for the day in such a way that he will be kept hanging about his own wife during the whole time he hoped to be amusing himself with mine! He is baffled already. Shall he make a dash for this one; or had he better keep a watchful eye on that one? In his bewilderment he will not know which way to turn. Meanwhile, the wedding hour is rapidly approaching: he will not have time to prevent it, and he would never dare openly oppose it in my lady's presence.

Suzanne. Perhaps not, but Marceline has sharp wits, and she will dare.

Figaro. Fiddlesticks! That doesn't worry me in the least. You can tell my lord that you will meet him at dusk in the garden.

Suzanne. You count on that, do you?

Figaro. Why not? People who will never dare any-

thing will never succeed in anything, and are no good for anything—that is what I say.

Suzanne. It is charming!

Countess. Like his idea. Would you consent to her going?

Figaro. Not at all. I will dress somebody in her clothes: then we could take the Count by surprise at this secret interview—and what could he say?

Countess. Whom would you send?

Figaro. Chérubin.

Countess. He has gone.

Figaro. Not for me: will you let me manage this affair?

Suzanne. He can be trusted to manage an intrigue.

Figaro. Two, three, four at a time, well mixed up and crossing each other. I ought to have been a courtier.

Countess. They say it is a difficult calling.

Figaro. Accept, take, ask: there is the secret in three words.

Countess. He has so much assurance that he inspires me with his own confidence.

Figaro. That is what I meant to do.

Suzanne. You were saying?

Figaro. That during my lord's absence I will send Chérubin to you; arrange his hair, dress him up, and I will wind him up and coach him; and then, my lord, we will lead you a pretty dance!

On Chérubin's arrival the two women set about disguising him, and whilst doing so discover that he has already received his commission, but that the Count, in his hurry to get rid of him, has forgotten to affix his seal to the document. The Countess is still busy dressing the page, whilst Suzanne has gone out to hide his cloak, when the Count's voice is heard outside:

Count. Why have you locked yourself in?

Countess (in confusion). My husband! Oh! heaven! (To Chérubin) You here without a cloak, with neck and arms bare, the room in disorder, the letter he has received, his jealousy! . . .

Count. Why do you not open the door?

Countess. Because . . . I—I am alone.

Count. Alone? . . . Then to whom are you speaking?

Countess (at a loss). To you, to be sure.

Chérubin (aside). After the scenes of yesterday and this morning he will kill me on the spot. (He darts into the boudoir and shuts himself in.)

The Countess quickly locks him in, removes the key, and runs to let the Count in.

Countess (aside). Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?

Count (harshly). You do not usually lock yourself in!

Countess. I was . . . I was doing needlework. . . . Yes, I was doing needlework with Suzanne; she has just gone to her room for a moment.

Count (looking at her closely). You seem very disturbed.

Countess. No wonder. . . . No wonder at all! . . . I assure you we were speaking of you. . . . She has just left me, as I told you.

Count. You were speaking of me! . . . My uneasiness brought me back. As I was mounting my horse a note was handed to me. I do not credit it in the least, but it has upset me.

Countess. What do you mean, sir? What note?

Count. You must admit, madam, that you and I are surrounded by . . . very . . . wicked people. I have been informed that somebody whom I thought to be absent would to-day seek access to you.

Countess. Whoever this daring person may be, he will have to penetrate here, for I do not intend to leave my room to-day.

Count. Except this evening for Suzanne's wedding?

Countess. On no account whatever: I am not well.

Count. Fortunately the doctor is here. (At this moment the page knocks over a chair in the boudoir.) What is that noise?

Countess (agitated). What noise?

Count. Somebody let a piece of furniture fall.

Countess. I . . . I did not hear anything.

Count. Then you must be very much preoccupied.

Countess. Preoccupied? Why should I be?

Count. There is somebody in this room, madam!

Countess. Oh! who do you think would be there?

Count. That is what I am asking you ; I have only just come.

Countess. Well . . . Suzanne is apparently arranging some things in there.

Count. You said she had gone to her room.

Countess. Either gone to her room or in there, I cannot tell.

Count. If it is Suzanne why are you so perturbed ?

Countess. Perturbed for my maid ?

Count. I do not know whether it is for your maid, but perturbed you certainly are.

Countess. I can assure you, sir, that girl agitates and perturbs you more than she does me.

Count (angrily). She perturbs me, madam, to such an extent that I desire to see her this instant.

Countess. I quite believe you very often desire it ; but what is the meaning of these singularly ill-founded suspicions ? . . . (At this moment Suzanne looks in at the door.)

Count. Then they will be all the easier to dispel. (He shouts outside the door of the boudoir.) Suzanne ! Come out this instant !

Suzanne stays near the alcove at the end of the room.

Countess. She has hardly anything on, sir. How can you disturb women thus in their privacy ? She is trying on some things I gave her on her marriage : she fled when she heard you.

Count. Even if she is so much afraid of showing herself, she can at least speak. (He again turns towards the door.) Answer me, Suzanne, are you in here ?

Suzanne hides herself in the alcove.

Countess. Suzanne, I forbid you to answer ! (To the Count) I have never heard of such tyranny !

Count. Well, since she will not speak, I mean to see her, dressed or undressed.

Countess (placing herself before the door). Anywhere else I should be powerless to prevent it, but in my own apartment I should think . . .

Count. I am determined this instant to see who this mysterious Suzanne can be. To ask you for the key would, I suppose, be useless, but it will be an easy matter to break open this light door. Hi ! somebody !

Countess. What can you be thinking about, creating a scandal before the servants ! You will make yourself the laughing-stock of the castle !

Count. Very well, madam ; in fact, I can do it myself. I will just get the necessary tools, but to make sure that everything remains as it is, you will perhaps do me the favour of coming with me, without scandal and without noise, since you object to them so much ! I take it you will not refuse such a simple request.

Countess. Ah, sir ! who dreams of crossing you ?

Count. Ah ! I forgot the door leading to your women's apartments ; that also must be shut in order that you may be fully vindicated.

He locks the outer door and removes the key.

Countess (aside). Good heavens ! What fatal imprudence !

Count (coming back to her). Now the room is locked, I beg you to take my arm, and as for this Suzanne in the boudoir, she must have the goodness to await my return.

Countess. Really, sir, this is the most odious treatment !

The Count leads her away and locks the door.

During their absence Chérubin opens the door and Suzanne takes his place in the boudoir, whereupon he jumps out of the window into the garden.

On his return with his wife, the Count warns her as to the consequences of her refusal to unlock the door. She expostulates with him in vain, and he prepares to break down the partition.

Countess (frightened). Oh ! sir, I implore you to listen to me calmly !

Count. Then it is not Suzanne !

Countess (timidly). Neither, at any rate, is it a person . . . whom you have any reason to fear . . . we were preparing a little practical joke . . . quite an innocent affair, truly, for this evening . . . and I swear to you——

Count. And you swear to me ?

Countess. That neither of us had the least intention of offending you.

Count. Neither of you ! Then it is a man !

Countess. A child, sir.

Count. Well, who is it ?

Countess. I hardly dare name him. . . .

Count. I'll kill him.

Countess. Oh, heaven !

Count. Speak !

Countess. Little . . . Chérubin !

Count. Chérubin, the insolent fellow ! That explains my suspicions and the note.

Countess (joining her hands). Ah, sir ! do not think . . .

He refuses to be appeased. The Countess, thereupon, confesses everything, and implores him to moderate his anger and not to put a wrong construction on an innocent but imprudent frolic, and warns him that he will find Chérubin half undressed. This still further infuriates her husband, and on her handing him the key he opens the door and finds Suzanne.

Suzanne (coming out, laughing). Kill him ! Why don't you kill that cursed page ?

Count (aside). What a mess ! (looking at the Countess). And you, too, are pretending to be astonished. But perhaps she is not alone. (He goes inside.)

Suzanne takes advantage of his momentary absence to urge her mistress to calm herself, and tells her that the page has escaped. The Count returns, looking very confused, and after a short silence, admits :

There is nobody there. This time I am wrong. . . . Madam . . . You are an excellent comedienne.

Suzanne (gaily). And what about me, my lord ? (The Countess, seeking to master her nerves, remains silent, her handkerchief pressed to her mouth.)

Count (approaching). Were you really joking, madam ?

Countess (slightly recovering herself). And why not, sir ?

Count. What a cruel jest ! What can have been your motive ? . . .

Countess (gradually regaining her self-control). Does your treatment of me deserve any pity ?

Count. But to trifle about things touching our honour !

Countess. Did I marry you to be constantly the victim of neglect and jealousy ?

Count. But this is carrying things too far !

Suzanne. What if my lady had let you call the servants?

Count. You are right; it is for me to humble myself. . . . Forgive me, I am . . .

Suzanne. You must admit, my lord, that you rather deserved it! . . .

Count. Why did you not come out when I called you, cruel girl?

Suzanne. I was dressing myself as quickly as I could with the aid of pins; . . . and then my lady had very good reason to forbid me.

Count. Instead of reminding me of my offence, help me rather to appease her.

Countess. No, sir, such an outrage is unpardonable. I shall retire into a convent. . . . I see only too well that it is more than time!

Count. Could you do such a thing without regret?

Suzanne. For my part, I am sure that the day of your going would be the eve of tears.

Countess. Even if that is so, Suzanne, I would rather regret it than incur the disgrace of forgiving him; he has offended me too much.

Count. Rosine!

Countess. I am no longer the Rosine whom you pursued so ardently! I am the unhappy Countess Almaviva, the sad, neglected wife whom you no longer love.

Suzanne. My lady!

Count. For pity's sake!

Countess. You had none for me.

Count. But that note. . . . It turned my brain!

Countess. It was written without my consent.

Count. You knew about it?

Countess. It was that foolhardy Figaro.

Count. He had a finger in it?

Countess. It was he who gave it to Basile.

Count. He told me he got it from a peasant. Oh! the lying blackmailer! The double-dealing rascal! You shall pay for everybody!

Countess. You ask forgiveness for yourself and refuse it to others; just like a man! Ah! if ever I consented to pardon you because of this note which caused you to offend, I should certainly stipulate for a general amnesty.

Count. With all my heart, Countess. But how can I atone for such a humiliating offence ?

Countess (rising). It was so for both of us.

Count. Oh, say rather for me alone! But I cannot yet understand how women so easily adapt their tone and bearing to the circumstances. You blushed, you wept, your face was haggard. . . . On my honour, it is so still.

Countess (with a forced smile). I was flushed . . . with resentment at your suspicions. But are men sensitive enough to distinguish between righteous indignation and the confusion arising from a just accusation ?

Count. And the page in disordered clothing, with hardly anything on.

Countess (pointing to Suzanne). There he is. Would you rather it had been the other ? You do not, as a rule, object to meeting this one.

Count (laughing outright). And those prayers, and feigned tears. . . .

Countess. You make me laugh, and I am scarcely in the mood for it.

Count. We rather fancy ourselves in politics, but we are mere children at it. It is you, madam, whom the King ought to send as his ambassador to London! In order to succeed so completely your sex must have made the most exhaustive study of the art of disguising your feelings.

Countess. It is you who force us to do so.

Suzanne. Make us prisoners on parole, and see what honourable creatures we are!

Countess. Let us drop the subject, Count. Perhaps I went too far. But my indulgence in such a serious matter ought at least to assure me of yours.

Count. But you will repeat that you forgive me ?

Countess. Did I say so, Suzon ?

Suzanne. I did not hear it, my lady.

Count. Oh, then, do say it !

Countess. Do you deserve it, ungrateful one ?

Count. Yes, by my repentance.

Suzanne. Fancy suspecting that there was a man in my lady's boudoir !

Count. She has punished me so severely

Suzanne. And then, not believe her when she told you it was her maid !

Count. Rosine, are you without mercy ?

Countess. Oh, Suzon ! how weak I am ! What an example I am giving you ! (Holding out her hand to the Count.) No one will evermore believe in a woman's anger.

Suzanne. Yes, indeed, my lady, it always comes to this in the end. (The Count ardently kisses his wife's hand.)

Figaro now comes running in completely out of breath.

Figaro (panting). They told me my lady was unwell. . . . I hurried here as fast as I could. . . . I am happy to see that there is nothing the matter.

Count (dryly). You are very attentive !

Figaro. It is my duty to be so. But since there is nothing amiss, my lord, your vassals of both sexes are waiting for permission to accompany me in leading in my bride. . . .

Count. But who will there be to look after the Countess at the castle ?

Figaro. To look after her ! She is not ill.

Count. No, but since the man who was to entertain her has not come.

Figaro. Which man ?

Count. The man referred to in the note you gave Basile.

Figaro. Who said so ?

Count. Even if I had no other means of finding out, you rascal, your face proves that you are lying !

Figaro. If that is so, it is not I who am lying : it is my face.

Suzanne. It is no use, my poor Figaro. You need not waste your breath : we have confessed everything.

Figaro. Confessed what ? You treat me as though I were another Basile.

Suzanne. That you wrote the note to make my lord believe, when he came in just now, that the little page was in the boudoir when it was I.

Count. What have you to say to that ?

Countess. Further concealment is useless, Figaro. The jest is consummated.

Figaro (trying to guess). The jest is . . . consummated ?

Count. Yes, consummated What have you got to say ?

Figaro. I ? . . . Well, all I can say is, that I wish as much could be said of my marriage !—and if you will give the order . . .

Count. So you admit writing the note ?

Figaro. Since my lady will have it so, and Suzanne will have it so, and you yourself will have it so, I suppose I also must have it so ; but if I were in your place, my lord, I would not believe a single word we have been telling you.

Count. Always lying against the evidence ; you will end by making me lose my temper.

Countess (laughing). The poor fellow. Why should you wish him to tell the truth for once, my lord ?

Meanwhile, Figaro, unobserved, tells Suzanne that the page is safe. The Countess now begs her husband to give the order for the ceremony to begin. At this moment the tippling gardener, Antonio, comes to complain that he saw a man jump out of the window on to his flower-beds. Figaro tries to turn the conversation, and accuses him of being drunk, and the Countess remarks that she cannot understand people drinking when they are not thirsty. Antonio replies that " to drink without thirst and to make love at all seasons are the only things which distinguish us from the other animals." The Count interrupts, threatening, if he will not give him direct answers, to dismiss him. " Do you think I would go ? " asks Antonio ; " if you have not enough of this " (touching his forehead) " to keep a good servant, I am not such a fool as to dismiss a good master." Figaro here declares that it was he who was in Suzanne's room when he heard the Count coming, and was so frightened that he jumped out of the window.

" Since it was you," says Antonio, " this piece of paper must belong to you." But before Figaro can take the note the Count snatches it away, and, turning to his valet, says : " Your fright cannot have made you forget the contents of this document, nor will it explain how you came to have it in your pocket." In order to gain time,

Figaro pretends to turn out his pockets. Unobserved, the Countess tells Suzanne that it must be Chérubin's commission, and she secretly passes on the information to Figaro.

Count. Come, my man of expedients, can you not guess ?

Figaro. Oh ! yes, it is that unhappy boy's commission, which he handed to me, and I forgot to return to him. What an absent-minded fellow I am ! Whatever will he do without his commission. I must run after him. . . .

Count. Why did he give it to you ?

Figaro (embarrassed). He . . . wanted something done to it.

Count. There is nothing the matter with it.

Countess (aside to Suzanne, who passes it on to Figaro). It has no seal.

Count. Why do you not answer ?

Figaro. As a matter of fact, it lacks only a small detail, but they say it is usually done.

Count. Usually done ! What is usually done ?

Figaro. To fix your seal—but perhaps it is hardly worth while.

Count (angrily crumpling up the document). Oh ! I see that I am fated to be left in ignorance of everything. (Aside.) It is this fellow Figaro who manages them all ; but, zounds ! I'll have my revenge on him ! (He walks quickly away.)

Figaro (disappointed, stops him). Please do not go without ordering my marriage.

Marceline now enters to demand that her case against Figaro be tried that very day, and Almaviva, well pleased, orders a chamber to be prepared for that purpose. Meanwhile, the Countess, in the hope of overcoming her husband's secret resistance to Suzanne's marriage, suggests that the latter shall pretend to agree to the Count's wishes, and that she herself, disguised in Suzanne's clothes, shall keep the appointment.

In the third act the Count seeks to discover how much Figaro suspects of his designs upon his bride.

Count. Why were you so long in answering my call ?

Figaro (pretending to adjust his clothes). I soiled my clothes when I jumped into the garden: I was changing.

Count. Does it take you an hour?

Figaro. It takes time.

Count. The servants in this place . . . take longer to dress than their masters.

Figaro. That is because they have no valets to help them.

Count. Even now I cannot understand what made you needlessly incur the risk of accident by throwing youself . . .

Figaro. Risk! you might say that I was swallowed alive! . . .

Count. Insidious fellow! Trying to put me on the wrong scent. You well know that it is not the risk that worries me, but the motive.

Figaro. On false information, you came rushing in, furiously angry, overturning everything, like the Morena in flood; you were looking for a man and determined to find him, breaking doors and forcing locks; by chance I happened to be there—how was I to know but that in your rage——

Count. You might have fled by the staircase.

Figaro. Yes, for you to catch me in the corridor.

Count (angrily). In the corridor! (Aside) I am losing my temper, and shall defeat my own purposes.

Figaro (aside). I see what he is after, and must play cautiously.

Count (more calmly). That is not what I intended to say; we will leave that. I had . . . yes, I had some intention of taking you with me to London as a Special Messenger . . . but upon further reflection——

Figaro. My lord has changed his mind?

Count. In the first place, you do not know English.

Figaro. I know God-dam.

Count. What do you mean?

Figaro. I say, I know God-dam.

Count. Well?

Figaro. English is a splendid language: a little goes a long way. A God-dam in England will carry you anywhere. Would you like to eat a good fat pullet; you have only to step into a tavern, and make this gesture to the waiter (he imitates the motion of turning a spit), God-dam!

they bring you a hunch of salt beef without bread. It is admirable! Do you fancy a glass of excellent Burgundy, all you need do is (he imitates the noise of drawing a cork), God-dam! they serve you with a fine pewter mug full of beer, frothing over the brim! What a comfort! Should you meet one of those pretty creatures, trotting along with her eyes on the pavement, her elbows pressed well back, and swaying slightly at the hips, you press your fingers gently together on your mouth—God-dam! she fetches you a clout like a porter! A sure proof that she understands! To be quite truthful, the English do add a few other words here and there, but it is easy to see that God-dam is the basis of their language, and if my lord has no other motive for leaving me behind in Spain . . .

Count (aside). He wants to go to London. She has told him nothing.

Figaro (aside). He thinks I know nothing; give him the line for awhile.

Count. What was the Countess's motive in playing me such a trick?

Figaro. Faith! my lord, you know that better than I do!

Count. I forestall her wishes in every way and load her with presents.

Figaro. You do, but you are unfaithful to her. What does one care for the superfluous if one is deprived of the necessary?

Count. At one time you used to tell me everything.

Figaro. And now I hide nothing from you.

Count. How much did the Countess give you for this precious transaction?

Figaro. How much did you give me for getting her out of the doctor's hands. Look here, my lord, you ought not to humiliate the man who serves you so well, for fear of turning him into a worthless valet.

Count. How is it that there is always something equivocal about everything you do?

Figaro. Suspicious people always find reasons for doubting others.

Count. But you have a villainous reputation.

Figaro. What if I am better than my reputation? Are there many noblemen who could say as much?

Count. I have seen you a hundred times on the road to fortune, but never going straight.

Figaro. What would you have? Down there amongst the crowd, everybody wants to get out of it quickly; they elbow, shove and trample upon each other; a few get on, the others are crushed. As for me, I have had enough of it: I give it up.

Count. What, making your fortune? (Aside) Here is something new.

Figaro (aside). Now it is my turn. (Aloud) Your Excellency has honoured me with the care of his castle; it is a very fine post; certainly I should not be the eagerly awaited bearer of all the most interesting news of the day, but on the other hand, happy with my wife in the heart of Andalusia. . . .

Count. What is to prevent you from bringing her with you to London?

Figaro. I should have to leave her so often that I should soon be sick of married life.

Count. With your character and intelligence you would soon make your way in the Government offices.

Figaro. Intelligence? My lord is surely poking fun at me! It is only the cringing mediocrity who gets on there!

Count. All you want is to study politics a little under my guidance.

Figaro. I know politics already.

Count. As you know English: the basis of the language!

Figaro. Yes, if that is anything to boast about. To pretend to be ignorant of what you know, to know what you are ignorant of, to comprehend what you do not understand, to pretend to be able to do the impossible, to keep the great secret that there is nothing to conceal, to deny your door to everybody in order to trim your pens, to look deep when you are only empty and hollow, to pretend to be somebody, to subsidize spies and to pension traitors, to intercept and open other people's letters, and to justify any dirty trick by the importance of the object in view—that is the beginning and the end of politics, or I am a dead man!

Count. That is intrigue which you have defined.

Figaro. Intrigue, politics—as you will ; but in my opinion they are pretty much the same thing. Anybody is welcome to them so far as I am concerned. '*J'aime mieux ma mie, O gué,* as the good king says in his song.*

Count (aside). He wants to stay. Suzanne has betrayed me.

Figaro (aside). Now I am paying him back in his own coin.

Count. So you hope to win your case against Marceline ?

Figaro. Would you make it a crime in me to reject the elderly woman, when Your Excellency permits himself to snap up all the young ones ?

Count (mocking). In the seat of judgment the magistrate forgets his own interests, he concerns himself solely with the administration of the law.

Figaro. Indulgent to the great and hard on the humble. . . .

Count. Do you think I am joking ?

Figaro. Who knows, my lord ? Time will tell, that is always truthful. Time alone will reveal who wishes me well and who wishes me ill.

Count (aside). I see that he has been told everything ; he shall marry the duenna.

Figaro (aside). He has been trying to trap me : what has he learnt ?

When Almaviva is alone, Suzanne comes running in, breathless.

Suzanne. My lord . . . forgive me, my lord !

Count (crossly). What is it, miss ?

Suzanne. You are angry with me.

Count. You want something, apparently.

Suzanne. My mistress has the vapours. I ran to beg you to lend us your smelling-salts. I will bring the bottle back in a moment.

Count (giving it to her). No, keep it for yourself ; you will want it before long.

Suzanne. Just as if women in my station have vapours ! Only people of position have vapours, it is only caught in boudoirs.

* The refrain of the famous love song of Henri IV.

Count. A girl very much in love who loses her intended . . .

Suzanne. By paying Marceline with the dowry you promised me. . . .

Count. Which I promised you, I ?

Suzanne (looking down). I thought I heard you say so, my lord.

Count. Yes, if you agreed to hear me yourself.

Suzanne (with lowered eyes). Is it not my duty to listen to Your Excellency ?

Count. Cruel girl ? Why did you not say so before ?

Suzanne. Is it ever too late to tell the truth ?

Count. You promise to be in the garden at dusk ?

Suzanne. Do I not take the air there every evening ?

Count. You treated me so harshly this morning !

Suzanne. This morning ? With the page behind the chair ?

Count. You are quite right. I was forgetting. But why this obstinate refusal when Basile on my behalf . . . ?

Suzanne. What necessity was there for such a person as Basile ?

Count. You are always right. Nevertheless, there is a certain Figaro, to whom I fear you tell everything.

Suzanne. Yes, to be sure ! I tell him everything—except what must be kept from him.

Count (laughing). Oh ! charming ! And you promise me ? If you break your word—let us understand each other, my dear—and there is no meeting, there will be no dowry and no marriage.

Suzanne (curtsying). On the other hand, no marriage, no seignorial right, my lord.

Count. Where did she learn to say such things ? Upon my word, I can see myself raving about her ! Is not your mistress waiting for the smelling-salts ?

Suzanne (laughing and handing back the phial). How could I come to speak to you without a pretext ?

Count (trying to embrace her). Delicious creature !

Suzanne (escaping). There is somebody coming.

Count (aside). She is mine ! (He hurries out.)

Suzanne. Now we must be quick and tell my lady all about it.

Here Figaro enters.

Figaro. Suzanne! Suzanne! Where are you running so quickly, after leaving my lord?

Suzanne. Now you can go to law as much as you like; you have just won your case. (She runs off.)

Figaro (following her). Here! wait a minute! I say!——

Unfortunately, Almaviva overhears their words, and promises to punish them "with a good, just sentence." He determines to encourage Antonio, who, he knows, despises Figaro, to refuse to let his niece, Suzanne, marry him. "In the vast field of intrigue," he reflects, "you must learn how to cultivate everything, even the vanity of a fool."

The next scene is the trial, in which the examining magistrate, Brid'oison, with his formalism, his quibbling redundancy and stammering imbecility, provides most of the fun. The whole scene is rather obviously dragged in, to give Beaumarchais an opportunity of ridiculing his judges and satirizing the anomalies of the law and judicial procedure. The author took care that there should be no doubt in the minds of his contemporaries as to the original of this preposterous magistrate, and all at once recognized that he was inviting them to laugh at Goëzman. An examination of the first draft of the play reveals the fact that Brid'oison was originally named "Gusman," but the allusion was afterwards made less conspicuous by transferring it from his surname to his Christian name. It was in this way, indeed, that Goëzman's name was spelt when it figured in the fatal list of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Judgment goes against Figaro and he is condemned to pay Marceline 2,000 piastres or marry her forthwith. But before the audience ends it is discovered, much to Almaviva's disgust, that Figaro is in reality the long-lost son of Marceline and Bartholo.

Meanwhile the Countess and Suzanne concoct a letter to the Count, making an appointment in the garden at night for the maid, which the mistress intends to keep.

Fanchette and the village girls (among whom is Chérubin

in disguise) now enter, bearing flowers for the Countess, and Antonio, before the whole company, unmasks the page. The Countess does her best to explain the situation, but the Count angrily announces his intention of punishing him for his disobedience. But at this threat Fanchette naïvely exclaims :

"Oh ! listen to me, my lord. Whenever you came to embrace me you always said, you know, 'if you will love me, my little Fanchette, I will give you whatever you like.'"

Count. Did I say that ?

Fanchette. Yes, my lord. Instead of punishing Chérubin, marry him to me, and I will love you ever so much.

Count (aside). Bewitched by a page !

Countess. Well, sir, it is now your turn. This child's naïve confession proves two things : that if I cause you anxiety it is always without intending to do so, whilst you do all you can to increase and justify mine.

The Count is utterly disconcerted. The trumpet now sounds for the fête to begin, and Figaro escapes with Suzanne and the girls. Almaviva unfastens Suzanne's letter, and in doing so tears his finger on the pin which holds it together. On reading the letter he sees that he is requested to return the pin as a sign that he has understood the message. Catching sight of Fanchette, he tells her to give the pin to her cousin. Whilst she is looking for Suzanne she encounters Figaro, and on being questioned by him, unwittingly convinces him that his bride has betrayed him.

The scene of the fifth act is laid, at night, in the chestnut grove in the park, the place fixed for Suzanne's pretended rendezvous with the Count.

The heart-broken Figaro paces to and fro, talking to himself : "O woman ! woman ! woman !" he cries, "frail and deceitful creature ; there is not a created animal that can help following its instinct ; is it yours to deceive ? . . . After having obstinately refused when I pressed her in the presence of her mistress, the moment she has given me her word—in the very place where the ceremony was to take place. . . . He laughed as he read it, the traitor !

And there stood I like a noodle ! . . . No, my lord ! you shall not have her ! . . . You shall not have her ! Because you are a great nobleman you think you are a great genius ! . . . Nobility, riches, rank, appointments make people so proud ! What have you done to deserve all these good things ? You have given yourself the trouble of being born, and nothing more ! Apart from that, quite an ordinary sort of man ! While I, lost in the obscure crowd, 'sdeath ! I have had to display more sagacity and ingenuity merely to exist than have been exercised in governing all the kingdoms of Spain during the last hundred years ! . . . Was there ever such a queer fate as mine ? Son of I know not whom ; stolen by bandits ; brought up among outlaws, I became disgusted with their ways, and tried to lead an honest life ; but was everywhere repulsed. I learnt chemistry, pharmacy, surgery, yet all the influence of a great nobleman barely succeeded in putting a veterinary surgeon's lancet in my hand ! . . . Tired of teasing sick animals, I thought I would try something quite different, so I threw myself whole-heartedly into the theatre : I should have done better to tie a millstone about my neck ! I wrote a comedy of the manners of the seraglio, for, being a Spanish author, I thought I might venture without offence to make game of Mahomet : at once an envoy, from I know not where, complained that my verses were an offence to the Sublime Porte, to Persia, to India, etc.—and my comedy was utterly ruined to please these Mahometan princes, not one of whom, I dare say, knew how to read ! . . . A public discussion arose on the nature of wealth, and as it is not necessary to possess things in order to discuss them, I wrote a treatise on money and its uses, and immediately I found myself flung into a cab, being carried off to a dungeon, where I was deprived of liberty and hope. Ah ! if only I could get one of these great people into my power for a day or two ! When once the disgrace had soaked into him and settled his pride, I would tell him that foolish writings are of importance only where their circulation is hindered ; that without the liberty of criticism there can be no praise worth having ; that only little people fear little books ! . . . Tired of nourishing an obscure pensioner, the authorities one day turned me out into the street, and since it is necessary to eat even

when one is not in prison, I again trimmed my pen, and asked what was the question of the day. I was told that during my economic retreat there was a new system of liberty of the press established in Madrid, and provided that I did not write about the Government, religion, politics, morality, people in office, powerful corporations, the Opera or other spectacles, or anybody who had anything, I was at liberty to print what I chose—after it had passed through the hands of three or four censors. To profit by this sweet liberty, I announced a periodical publication, which, in order to infringe nobody's rights, I named *The Useless Journal*. Whew! at once a thousand poor devils of the press rose against me, and I was suppressed! There was I again without employment! I was nearly desperate, when somebody proposed me for a vacancy, but unfortunately I was fully qualified to fill it. They wanted an accountant: it was a dancer who got the job! The only thing left for me was to steal: so I opened a faro bank. Then, my word! I supped in town, and thoroughly respectable gentlefolk politely offered me their houses, on the understanding that I made over to them three-quarters of the profits. I soon began to understand that to make money, dexterity is more useful than knowledge. But since everybody around me swindled, whilst demanding that I should remain honest, I was soon once more reduced to beggary. I was preparing to quit the world, when a beneficent Deity called me to my first trade. I again took up my knapsack and my leather, and leaving the smoke to the fools who nourished themselves on it and shame in the roadway as too heavy a burden for a foot-passenger, I went shaving from town to town—and I lived without a care in the world. A great gentleman happened to be in Seville when I arrived there; he recognized me; I was the means of winning for him the lady of his choice . . . and now, as a reward for my services, he tries to intercept mine! . . . Why has all this happened to me? Why these things and not others? Who has put this upon me? Compelled to follow the path in which I was placed without my consent, which I shall have to leave against my will, I have strewn it with such flowers as my gaiety permitted; I say *my* gaiety, not knowing whether it is mine more than the rest, nor even what is this *I* about which I concern myself. An

unformed conglomeration of unknown parts ; a helpless, unintelligent being, a frolicsome little animal, a young man eager for pleasure, with every taste for enjoyment, following every trade in order to live ; master here, valet there, as it pleased fortune! Ambitious through vanity, laborious from necessity, but finding real felicity in idleness ; an orator when threatened by danger, amusing myself now with poetry, now with music, subject to mad gusts of passion. I have seen everything, done everything, worn out everything . . . and now disillusion! . . . utter disillusion! . . . Suzon, Suzon, Suzon! how you torment me! . . . I hear somebody coming. . . . Now is the critical moment!"

The play ends in a mad scene of blindman's buff, in which the Count for the third time finds himself hopelessly in the wrong, and is reduced to crave his wife's forgiveness, which is graciously accorded, whilst Figaro is only too happy to have his ears soundly boxed by Suzanne for daring to doubt her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BEAUMARCHAIS AND MIRABEAU

AS the readiest way of getting themselves talked about, youthful aspirants to the honours of the forum have been known to adopt the practice of involving some eminent public man in a controversy, and then seeking to disparage and overwhelm him and all that he stands for, in a merciless combat of wits. The celebrity of Beaumarchais at this time caused him to be singled out as a fit subject for such attentions by a most redoubtable adversary of this type. A few years before the production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, two engineering experts, the brothers Perrier, had conceived the project of supplying Paris with water drawn from the Seine by means of a steam pump, which they installed on the heights of Chaillot. Being short of capital, they had applied to Beaumarchais, who had promptly financed the scheme and founded the Paris Water Company for its exploitation. He had also become a director and one of the chief shareholders. For a few years the shares fell considerably below par, but in 1785 they suddenly recovered and began to rise rapidly in value. Several bankers, whose interests were threatened by this unexpected turn of events, set themselves to arrest the revival.

At this moment, Mirabeau, fresh from gaol, and in his habitual state of impecuniosity, happened to be in Paris seeking an opening for his talents, and eager, as ever, to sell his pen to the highest bidder. His noisy amours, his lawsuits and his amazing adventures had won him some notoriety in scandalous chronicle, but otherwise he was unknown to fame. He had, however, already done a considerable amount of literary hack-work for the financiers Clavière and Panchaud, the two men most

adversely affected by the success of the Paris Water Company. They supplied him with tendacious statistics, and hired him to concoct a pamphlet denying the advantages of the scheme, and even boldly asserting that the operations of the company were against the public interest.

When the old Marquis de Mirabeau heard of this transaction, he wrote of his son : " This gentleman is now in the pay of the speculators ; they use him as one uses an ill-conditioned, dangerous cur, which is set on to bark at the heels of passers-by, and is always ready to snap when bidden."

Beaumarchais, as a director and principal shareholder of the company, thinking that it was in the public interest to prove the contrary of Mirabeau's assertions, replied to the future orator in a calm and reasoned statement ; but, after treating his opponent with marked deference and complimenting him on the ability he had displayed in making out his case, he declared that the author of the pamphlet he was reviewing "was in the pay of speculators known to have the greatest interest in the fall of the market." He reminded his readers that " novel enterprises had at all periods of history encountered strenuous opposition," and then, to put the laugh on his side, characteristically added : " When the criticisms were very bitter they were called *Philippics*. Perhaps in the future some wag would call the present ones by the pretty name of *Mirabelles*, as derived from the Comte de Mirabeau, who *Mirabilia fecit*." He ended by begging the Comte's pardon in advance if any expression had escaped him of which he disapproved.

Now, when a man means to be sarcastic it is futile to introduce his cutting remarks by a conciliatory preamble of this kind, for it is impossible to say offensive things in an inoffensive way. Such tactics can be safely employed only with a subordinate, who is in no position to reply to them. With an equal, it is like suddenly lowering one's guard when the engagement is at its height, and to equals and inferiors alike it is adding insult to injury.

Mirabeau took full advantage of his opponent's mistake. His reply, full of treacherous insinuations, is a bitter denunciation of the life, character and writings of



Gabriel Honoré Riquetti, Comte de Mirabeau.

From a mezzotint by Levachez.

[*To face p.* 272.

"that mountebank Beaumarchais," as he was pleased to call him. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, he declared, "Every order of the State, every class of society, every law, every rule of life is lacerated, insulted, outraged." Then, turning on its author, he wrote:

"As for you, sir, who, by putting a slanderous interpretation upon my intentions and my motives, have forced me to treat you with a harshness which nature has placed neither in my heart nor mind; you, whom I never provoked, and to contend with whom would be neither useful nor honourable, I advise you to profit by the bitter lesson which you have compelled me to give you. Withdraw your unsolicited compliments, for on no account whatever am I able to reciprocate them. Take back the pitiful excuses you proffer to me; withdraw the insolent esteem which you dare to express to me! Henceforth aspire to nothing but to deserve to be forgotten!"

Beaumarchais was no Joseph—on the contrary—but is it not an engaging spectacle to see the scandalized author of the *Erotica Biblion* emerge, reeling, from the obscurity of the Paphian groves to champion the cause of public and private morality, so shamelessly outraged in the life and writings of the creator of Figaro?

If Gudin is to be credited, the quarrel actually originated in his friend's refusal to accommodate the impecunious Comte with a loan. "Mirabeau," he says, "who was at that time known only by his love affairs, his debts, and his eloquent work on *Lettres de Cachet*, lived solely upon borrowed money. He called upon Beaumarchais. They knew each other only by reputation. The conversation which followed was gay, lively and witty; before taking his leave the Comte, with the easy familiarity peculiar to habitual borrowers, asked him for a loan of twelve thousand francs. Beaumarchais refused with the whimsical gaiety which distinguished him.

"'But it would be easy for you to lend me this amount,' said Mirabeau.

"'No doubt,' retorted Beaumarchais, 'but, M. le Comte, since I should have to quarrel with you on the

day the debt fell due, I would just as soon it should be to-day—and I shall be twelve thousand francs in pocket.' "*

However this may be, the conflict was fast and furious, but of short duration, for, like Major O'Flaherty on a similar occasion, the natural impetuosity of both parties to the quarrel had urged them "to fight first and explain afterwards."†

Beaumarchais, with that sympathetic indulgence towards the weaknesses and necessities of his fellows which is such a charming trait of his character, never pressed the advantage which his knowledge of the seamy side of Mirabeau's career afforded him, and made no reply to his abuse. His dignity and forbearance, under great provocation—aided perhaps by an opportune private loan—soon induced the great orator, who, after all, was a gentleman, to make the first advances towards a reconciliation. Beaumarchais asked for nothing better. Such affairs are easily accommodated when both parties are as entirely free from pettiness and retrospective malice as were Beaumarchais and Mirabeau. M. de Loménie has published an amusing correspondence which subsequently passed between them, and in his latter years Beaumarchais, the survivor, could write of the man who was destined to carry the maxims of Figaro into action:

"We were really divided more in feeling than in opinion. He changed his mind about me, and very handsomely made amends for his misjudgment of me."

* See Gudin, "Histoire de Beaumarchais," p. 363.

† See Richard Cumberland's play, *The West Indian*, first acted in 1771.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TRIBULATIONS OF A KNIGHT-ERRANT

BEAUMARCHAIS was no sooner out of one scrape than he was in another; or, rather, he was for most of his life in several scrapes at the same time.

Dining one day with his friends, the Prince and Princesse de Nassau-Siegen, says Gudin, he was deeply moved by the pitiable story, told at table, of a girl wife and mother of nineteen, against whom an unprincipled and tyrannical husband had obtained a *lettre de cachet*, by means of which he had caused her to be imprisoned for the past six months in a penitentiary for loose women and lunatics. Seeing his emotion, his hosts begged him to join them in an attempt to secure the prisoner's release, their own efforts having proved unsuccessful. At first he excused himself from being drawn into a domestic quarrel between people who were complete strangers to him, declaring that he "had never yet performed a praiseworthy and generous action which had not caused him endless worries and vexations, whereas all his successes had been entirely due to his amusing follies." He may also possibly have remembered Sganarelle's lesson to M. Robert when the latter made a timid effort to stop that worthy from beating his wife. "*Apprenez*," cried Sganarelle, "*que Cicéron dit qu'entre l'arbre et le doigt il ne faut point mettre l'écorce*," and thereupon proceeded to beat him unmercifully. Beaumarchais would have done well to act on that sound advice, for it was he who received the heaviest blows in the prolonged and relentless encounter between the engaging Kornmann and his wife.

With a view to overcoming his last scruples, his host showed him an affecting petition which the unhappy girl had addressed to the President of the Parlement. From this document it appeared that she was a Protestant of

Swiss birth, and an orphan, whose relatives had persuaded her very reluctantly to marry, at fifteen years of age, an Alsatian banker, named Kornmann, to whom she brought a dowry of 360,000 francs, besides a personal fortune of 60,000 francs. She had two children and was again about to become a mother.

Her husband being on the point of bankruptcy, she had endeavoured to prevent her dowry from falling into his hands, more for her children's sake than for her own. This had irritated her husband, who avenged himself by procuring a *lettre de cachet* against her, on an accusation of adultery, and causing her to be conveyed secretly to prison. She was not in a position to deny the charge made against her, but claimed the right to defend her life, honour and fortune before the law. In other words, he sued for divorce on the ground of her bad conduct, whilst she counter-petitioned on the plea of his bad business.

The Prince further showed Beaumarchais several affectionate letters, written by Kornmann to the man whom he afterwards accused of seducing her, in one of which he says : "Everything depends upon her, and, for my part, I know how to make allowances for human frailty, for my happiness will always consist in assuring that of my wife." Could anything be more explicit ? The accused man was an elegant and witty young gentleman, whose acquaintance Beaumarchais had made at the time of the Goëzman trial, named Daudet de Jossan, a grandson of the celebrated actress Adrienne Lecouvreur and Marshal de Saxe.

Under the patronage of the Prince de Montbarey, Minister of War, Daudet had been appointed Deputy Official Receiver of the city of Strasburg. This position giving him a considerable amount of influence in Alsace, Kornmann had invited him to his house in Paris, and had introduced him to his wife. Daudet had promptly fallen in love with her. Perceiving his infatuation, the provident Kornmann accepted the situation with philosophy, discreetly threw the young people into each other's society, and used his friend's credit with the minister to the utmost for his own advancement. All went comfortably until the Prince was dismissed from office, and was succeeded by a minister "that knew not Joseph," when Daudet

lost his post. Simultaneously, the accommodating husband became transformed into a veritable Othello.

Kornmann's letters revealed such baseness that Beaumarchais, proceeds Gudin, filled with indignation and loathing, at once made up his mind, hastened to the ministers, and worried them until he had obtained an order from the King revoking the *lettre de cachet* and directing the Lieutenant of Police, Le Noir, to convey the prisoner to a private hospital, where she could receive proper medical attention and consult with her legal advisers as to the conduct of her case against her tormentor. The knight-errant's reputation for gallantry naturally aroused suspicion of his motive in befriending the distressed lady, but the tone of their correspondence entitles him to the benefit of the doubt. To her he is always "Dear Papa."

Thus the man who was powerless to avert his own arbitrary and dishonouring imprisonment proved himself to have more influence than a Prince and Princess when the matter was to secure the prompt release of another. Can we wonder at the lengths to which Figaro's exasperation carried him, or at the ever-increasing bitterness of his gibes against the existing social order ?

Meanwhile the affairs of Kornmann went from bad to worse, and Beaumarchais, we are told, continued to give the young wife the benefit of his counsels and experience in her efforts to save her fortune.

Six years passed, during which Kornmann made the acquaintance of a splenetic and ambitious young advocate, named Bergasse, on the look out, as Mirabeau had been before him, to seize the first chance of pushing his way forward. Kornmann, still eagerly in pursuit of his wife's dowry, confided to his new friend his version of the distressing story, and appears to have convinced him of its substantial truth. Bergasse at once perceived that the fact of Beaumarchais being mixed up in the case provided an excellent opportunity, almost entirely free from risk, of exercising his talents. He urged Kornmann to bring a criminal lawsuit for adultery against Daudet, and Le Noir (now retired from office and, therefore, no longer to be feared), whom he declared also to have been on intimate terms with his wife, coupling with them the names of the

Prince and Princesse de Nassau-Siegen and Beaumarchais as guilty of aiding and abetting her misconduct.

Bergasse put this accusation in a literary setting, in which he represented Beaumarchais as the prime mover in a vile plot to ruin the domestic peace of the honest Kornmann. This pamphlet, which was signed by the aggrieved husband and ostensibly written by him, was widely circulated throughout Paris. It is, on the whole, a dull and pompous document, weak in logic, but full of venom against Beaumarchais and hot-air philosophy and sounding phrases for general consumption. So far as we have been able to understand him, Bergasse made his client plead alternatively to be allowed to rid himself of his wife because she was a worthless baggage, but to retain her dowry, as the more useful article ; or, that if he could not keep the dowry alone, he was perfectly willing to welcome wife and dowry together, but that scoundrel Beaumarchais had deliberately set himself to prevent the reconciliation of an affectionate couple suffering under a temporary estrangement. A peculiarity of the pamphlet is that the orator, in the heat of inspiration, seems often to lose sight of his client's interests altogether, and causes him to make some singular admissions, coming from a justly incensed husband. He naïvely explains, for instance, that the reason why he had allowed six years to elapse before taking legal action against his wife's accomplices was that M. Le Noir, one of the defendants, "had promised him a post in the Indies." In fact, he reminds us irresistibly of the defending advocate's alleged peroration in the trial of the unfortunate Marshal Bazaine :

"I ask you, gentlemen," exclaimed this orator to the jury, "to look carefully at the accused. That, I tell you, is not the face of a traitor : it is the face of an imbecile !"

As for Beaumarchais, every art of the libeller was enlisted to blacken his life and character.

His reply was to publish Kornmann's letters to Daudet, with a running commentary, thus putting his adversary for the second time in the awkward dilemma in which he found himself when Daudet's advocate at the trial concluded his speech for the defence with the words : "Either you are the most wicked slanderer or the vilest of husbands : whichever you like." Beaumarchais was not the man to

be slandered with impunity, for in spite of all that his apologists have said to the contrary, his own weapons in a warfare of this kind were none too clean, as is proved by a hitherto unpublished letter, addressed to him at this time, by the enterprising Théveneau de Morande. As this document, which has escaped the notice of previous writers, furnishes an illuminating commentary on the naïve confidence, so often expressed, in the assertion of Beaumarchais that, by dint of his persuasive eloquence, he had definitely converted "this expert poacher into an excellent gamekeeper," we propose to quote it at some length. Moreover, its deft combination of whine, wheedle and threat bears eloquent testimony to the strange lack of discrimination Beaumarchais often displayed in the choice of his familiars.

"I have often heard you declare," wrote Morande from London on the 7th July, 1787, "that you had adopted as your motto 'Either a millionaire or be broken on the wheel.' However that may be, my personal interest demands that I should look for you and that I should find you. In case my first letter should have miscarried, I have the honour of writing you a second one, and to ensure its reaching you I have made two copies, one of which I shall address to M. Bergasse and the other to M. le Comte de Mirabeau, with the request that they will forward them to you. These gentlemen, or at least one of them, will assuredy know what has become of you.

"You will remember, sir, that in your letters of the 4th, 13th, 19th and 27th of March and the 3rd and 6th of June last, you requested me to insert in my *Courrier de l'Europe* several articles of your own composition, in which you forbade me to make any alteration, and that, moreover, you required that everything should be printed without inverted commas in order that nobody should suspect that anyone but myself was the author. Four of these articles were against M. Guillaume Kornmann: you paid me for them at the rate of a guinea a line. I do not complain of the price: it was quite reasonable. As to the fifth article, I refused to insert it in my *Courrier*, because, upon my word, accustomed as I am to write anything that I am asked (for money, you understand), a kind of remorse prevailed over my cupidity, and I preferred

to gain so much less rather than be an accomplice in the slander of a man to whom I am under some obligation, and to whom you yourself are under still greater ; and, I must confess, sir, this behaviour of yours proved to me that I have still a great deal to learn in the art of doing harm.

"I quite understand that this side-thrust, this furtive kick, creates a diversion and makes your own case appear in a less odious light, but, however *weighty* your reasons might be, I was unable to serve you on this occasion. Can it be, by any chance, this refusal—which would do me infinite honour in the eyes of all honest men—can it be, I say, this refusal which has embittered you against me, and now deprives me of your answer, of which I am in great need for my peace of mind ? For, after all, you know, M. G. Kornmann's complaint is a serious matter. Not that I fear the consequences, for I have sixty such cases on my hands, and, I assure you, feel not a penny the worse. But the consequences I *do* feel are lest my *Courrier* should fall into discredit. If that were to happen, it would mean farewell to my sole means of existence, and I should lose everything if I allowed my love of you and your money to lead me into an infraction of the law. If the King of France, who enjoys a laugh like anyone else—but will on no account tolerate slander and defamation of character, because he loves honour and virtue—if this good King, at the instigation of one of his Ministers—M. de Lamoignon, for example, who, to the confusion of libellers, has succeeded * * * * —should take it into his head to forbid the entry of my unlucky *Courrier* into the country, what would become of me ? . . .

"If I knew how to do anything else, I would not mind a bit ; but I only know how to slander : it is my only trade. And I will say this for it : I know of few more lucrative or amusing professions. It should, therefore, sir, be regarded by you as a matter of honour to come to my aid.

"In your letters you promised to give me every assistance, and I claim the fulfilment of your word. You assured me that you could 'twist the Ministers and Chief Clerks round your little finger,' etc., etc. Now is the moment to make use of your influence with them.

"This would be but an act of justice on your part towards me, for, I repeat, if my *Courrier* is banned in

France, where I have over four thousand subscribers, I am ruined, and the only thing for me to do will be to throw myself into the Thames.

"If, on the contrary, you come honourably to rescue me from the cruel situation in which I now find myself, you can count on my eternal gratitude: I will give you the preference over everyone else for the insertion of articles which you may wish to have published in my *Courrier*. If I thought self-interest to be a more powerful incentive with you to dispel all my fears, I would make you a proposal. If you will prevail upon the Ministers to allow the continued entry of my periodical into France, I will undertake to publish your articles at the greatly reduced rate of twelve livres per line. . . .

"It is a pity this Kornmann has settled in France. If only he had been a temporary resident—Oh! what a lot of money I should earn! . . . But these permanent settlers pay all the various taxes and impositions, and are, therefore, invaluable to the Royal Treasury, whereas a foreigner is . . . well, a foreigner, and pays nothing. . . .

"During the last few years I have been doing exceedingly good business, and if only I had known how to behave myself and take care of my money, I should be rich, even very rich, by now; but some damned fatality or other has always decreed that what I saved on the swings I should spend on the roundabouts.

"As you are fond of proverbs, sir, I have not hesitated to put this one into my letter; indeed, without being able to prove them, where would be *La Précaution Inutile* and *La Folle Journée*.

"A few printers, colporteurs, and all the booksellers of Paris are less delicate than I, for they print, distribute and sell a multitude of brochures in which you are treated like the child of a noble family: they will not excuse you even a *peccadillo*. . . .

"Ah! well, sir, that is the way they earn their living, and I am sure you do not mind contributing indirectly to the good which results from the ill they do you directly. That is the sign of a lofty soul. A Kornmann would have roared, shouted, bawled, bellowed (*bellowed* is the word: there is certainly an analogy between the animal that bellows and Kornmann: you know that as well as

anyone, except, of course, Messrs. Daudet, etc., and the *young Dutchman*, who knows it even better than you do). Kornmann, then, would have bellowed . . . whilst you, everybody assures me that you laughed at it—capital fellow!

" All these little lampoons come to a rascally bookseller in London, who reprints them in French and English (how their authors' vanity must be flattered to be translated into English !).

" Everybody is talking about you in the clubs, the taverns and the public walks ; nobody can open his mouth in society without your name cropping up. Your affairs are the one topic of discussion from the Haymarket to St. James's, and from the Tower to Tyburn. If some people fling you to the wolves, others find plausible motives for your conduct : one of our sage Ministers thinks it very likely that you took Madame Kornmann into your care with the sole object of leading that wandering sheep back to the bosom of the Church, and that you must certainly have caught this taste for the conversion of souls while in the retreat you were invited to make at Saint Lazare.

" It is announced here that your life is to be published. That should be a very fetching morsel if well done. For my part, I doubt whether the details will be strictly true to fact, or whether the writer will be able to catch the continual play of expression, the lines, gradations, colours, shadows, tints and half-tints so essential to the faithful rendering of your physiognomy. The value of a portrait resides entirely in its perfect resemblance to the sitter : and no painter, however great his ability, will succeed in faithfully portraying you. The last verse of a well-known couplet might be appositely applied to your case :

'Pour dire ce qu'il est, il faut être lui-même!'

" In fact, sir, if you would take the trouble to write your own life ; if, like a new Augustine, you would make a general confession, giving names, places and circumstances—what a hit the book would make ! I am certain that you could sell the MS. for a thousand guineas, and that is well worth the trouble. If the public were as curious about my life as they are about yours I would not hesitate a moment. Faith ! Long live money ! say I, for it is the only thing worth having in this world !

"Before closing, I must tell you, sir, that the feebleness of your reply to Kornmann's first pamphlet is responsible for a rumour which is being widely circulated and credited in London, to the effect that you were not really the author of the famous *mémoire* which spread your reputation beyond the alcoves, boudoirs and ante-chambers; that, on the contrary, at the time of that great lawsuit you were so petrified with terror that you were incapable of doing anything whatsoever. . . .

"We thoroughly understand and admire each other," wrote Morande in conclusion, "and were not made to be enemies."

In this singularly damaging epistle the medicine is administered with the greatest economy of jam, and it is clear that Beaumarchais got very little satisfaction from this henchman, whose sword inflicted far more dangerous wounds on those who fought with him than on those who fought against him.

As for Bergasse, his assaults on the name and good fame of Beaumarchais proceeded with an ever-increasing fury. He characterized the author of *Figaro* as "a man whose sacrilegious existence testifies in a glaringly shameful manner to the degree of profound depravity at which we have now arrived," and in another *mémoire*, this time speaking for himself, cried: "Wretch! thou sweatest crime!" A man should be very sure of his own virtue before venturing on such amenities, for, generally speaking, the better a man is the more good he will find in others.

In spite of the inflated style in which they were couched some of the shafts reached their mark. Beaumarchais lost his temper altogether, and, whilst Figaro was still declaiming upon the stage against arbitrary imprisonment and other abuses of the time, his creator applied for and obtained a *lettre de cachet* against his relentless persecutor. In his terror Bergasse was happily inspired to write personally to the King the following letter, which, we believe, has not previously been published:

"September 18th, 1788.

"SIRE,

"An honest man places his honour, his liberty and his life in Your Majesty's hands.

"He is threatened.

"He has it in his power to escape.

"Reflecting upon what he has nobly done, and on the personal virtues of Your Majesty,

"He stands his ground.

"Your Majesty's most faithful subject, etc.,

"Bergasse."

This letter attained its object, and Louis at once rescinded the *lettre de cachet*. The whole incident shows that Bergasse was a more redoubtable enemy than the apologists of Beaumarchais have given him credit for.

By a judgment rendered on the 2nd of April, 1789, the memoirs of Bergasse were ordered to be suppressed as "false, abusive and slanderous," and he was condemned to pay Beaumarchais 1,000 livres damages and warned against a repetition of his offence "on pain of exemplary punishment." Kornmann was judged guilty of collusion, and his petition against his wife and Daudet dismissed, whilst he also was condemned in damages to the same amount as Bergasse.

But though Beaumarchais had won a decisive victory and vindicated his name in the eyes of the law, the case had a most damaging effect on his reputation with the general public, for Bergasse had skilfully manœuvred himself into the position which, in the Goëzman trial, had been occupied by his opponent, and was generally regarded as the upholder of the cause of the people against the machinations of the aristocrats. He had, moreover, succeeded in instilling into the public mind the dastardly suggestion that his adversary was a secret agent of the Court party, and, worse still, that he was guilty of cornering wheat ; and all the efforts of Beaumarchais to clear himself of this suspicion were in vain.

Thus, by a strange fatality, the most daring herald of the new era found himself, at its dawn, almost universally regarded with fear and mistrust.

CHAPTER XXX

TARARE, AND THE LAST INCARNATION OF FIGARO

WHEN the storm of the Kornmann case broke over him Beaumarchais was occupied, among other things, with the establishment of the first French Discount Bank, of which he was one of the promoters, a scheme for a Panama Canal, the collecting of MSS. for the Royal Library (the Bibliothèque Nationale owes him a great debt of gratitude for his services in saving and restoring large quantities of precious documents), and the rehearsals of his new opera *Tarare*. This was apart from the numerous enterprises described in the previous chapters, most of which still demanded unremitting attention.

For many years past he had held decided and unconventional views on operatic composition. He ridiculed the lyrical drama of his day as a survival of an outworn tradition, and hoped one day to write a work in which "all the fine arts should be combined and brought into harmony," and to give a new lease of life to this form of drama. When, therefore (according to a contemporary letter we have seen), an acquaintance asked if he could suggest a motto to be inscribed over the newly built Opera-house, he replied :

"Nail this up until it deserves a better :

> "Á l'Opéra tout est parfait,
> Hors l'Opéra qui n'est pas fait."

The credit of the discovery that at least the first prose draft of *Tarare* was in existence soon after the production of *The Barber of Seville* belongs to M. Lintilhac, who regales us with several piquant extracts from this forgotten MS., in his scholarly work, *Beaumarchais et ses œuvres*.

Whilst reading Hamilton's charming tale, *Fleur d'Épine*,

Beaumarchais was struck by the grotesque name of the principal character Tarare, and by the extraordinary effect which this name produced upon all who heard it. In Hamilton's story Tarare is represented as an uncommonly intelligent and sagacious person of humble birth, who succeeds in raising himself to wealth and power by dint of cleverness in overcoming every kind of difficulty and embarrassment—a man, in short, very like Figaro and his creator. Beaumarchais, then, borrowed this name from Hamilton, and gave it to a warrior whose prowess had aroused the fear and jealousy of the tyrant he served, who could never hear it pronounced without straightway falling into an uncontrollable rage and committing some violence from which arose fresh dramatic complications.

The plot of the opera, however, was taken from the translation of a Persian tale called *Sadak and Kalasrade*, but its inflated pseudo-philosophical nonsense belongs to Beaumarchais alone.

In a fantastic prologue he introduces "The Spirit of Reproduction, or Nature," occupied with the creation of life in concert with the "Spirit of Fire (enthroned in the sun), the lover of Nature." These two genii produce, like rabbits from a hat, the *dramatis personæ* of the opera, as required. They next evoke two shadows (from heaven knows where), and discuss which shall be King. After due consideration, the Spirit of Fire, by "the laying on of hands," makes one of the shadows the Emperor Atar, King of Ormuz, an Asiatic despot, and the other a common soldier, Tarare, who is destined to represent the triumph of virtue and intelligence over the gifts of birth and chance. Like another David, the Emperor covets Tarare's one ewe lamb, and gives secret orders for the recalcitrant husband to be set in the forefront of the battle; but this Uriah by a nice combination of astuteness and audacity frustrated the designs of this despotic Almaviva, rescued his Asiatic Suzanne from the wiles of an Oriental Basile in the person of the Chief Brahman, overthrew the incontinent Atar, and was unanimously elected to reign in his stead.

To tell the truth, this turbaned Figaro is a very dull dog. In his journey from the castle in Spain to the heart of Asia he has lost in gaiety and humour what he has gained in uprightness. He has become a freethinking, meta-

physical and annoyingly argumentative pedant, with a mania for declaiming against Church and State, and noblemen, and cabbages and Kings.

Tarare is, indeed, a monstrous and indigestible composition, in second-rate verse. As M. Jourdain would have said, there is too much *brouillamini* about the drama. It contains a little philosophy, physics, metaphysics, physical science, freethought, a new mythology—a little of everything, in short, except the quenchless wit and humour which we find everywhere else in the work of Beaumarchais.

This is strange, for the prose draft, mentioned above, is by no means devoid of fun and Rabelaisian high spirits. When, for example, the Sultan (Atar) complains to Calpigi, the Eunuch, of the monotony of his existence, surrounded as he is by his too, too loving wives, the slave replies :

" Ah ! if only there were a Frenchman here, he would scale the walls of your seraglio in the twinkling of an eye, solely for the pleasure of tasting a piece of Sultana."

" And I would have him hanged, even though he were a man of rank."

" He would not mind that in the least : they are never proud when they are love-making."

When Beaumarchais had completed his MS., says Gudin, he sent it to Gluck, with the suggestion that he should set it to music. The aged composer, we are told, was flattered by the proposal, and promised to undertake the work, but later discreetly came to the conclusion that it was beyond his strength, and suggested his favourite pupil Salieri as a substitute.

Beaumarchais invited this young Italian to stay at his house, won him over to his views, and the pair shut themselves up and set to work. Having the composer under his thumb, as it were, he was determined that there should not be too much music ; or, at any rate, not enough to prevent the audience from hearing every word of his *libretto*.

The piece was superbly mounted, the decoration and costumes alone costing the author fifty thousand francs. All was ready for the first performance, when Beaumarchais made the Kornmann libel action the pretext for addressing

the following letter to the Baron de Breteuil, Controller of the Royal Household:

"M. le Baron,

"I am grieved that the very stars in their courses seem to be fighting against something which I believe pleases you: the production of my *Tarare* and my scheme for the improvement of that spectacle; but a tile has fallen on my head: I am injured, and I think I ought to dress my wounds before amusing myself by setting the nymphs dancing.

"I have the honour of forwarding to you a copy of my preliminary letter to the public. A memoir, clearer than the day, will soon pulverize my dastardly adversaries. But how, sir, can I amuse myself by amusing others whilst I am being slandered?

"Ought I not to begin by sternly taking up my position as an honourable man, from which these ruffians seek to oust me, before turning my attention to my night-cap reveries?

"I quite see how much this will prejudice the opera. I only wish I could arrange matters otherwise, but the conduct of a libel action and the rehearsals of an opera are too incongruous for there to be any hope of reconciling them, and I, therefore, beg that you will not take it amiss if I withdraw my work for the present. . . .

"This 19th May, 1787."

The next day M. de la Ferté forwarded the Baron's reply:

"I have received your letter of the 19th inst., sir, enclosing that of M. de Beaumarchais, and I cannot understand why the unforeseen circumstances in which he finds himself should preclude the production of the opera *Tarare*. The public is eagerly looking forward to it, and its success, which we have every reason to regard as certain, can only bring added lustre to his literary reputation, and will be a first step in his triumph over his adversaries.

"Moreover, since the King has graciously consented to contribute to the expenses of the opera, if the receipts should be insufficient, and very considerable sums have

already been expended on the mounting of the work, its presentation cannot now be postponed without compromising His Majesty's interests and incurring grave financial losses.

"Further, this course would greatly prejudice the opera, for it would be breaking faith with the public. I urged these objections upon M. de Beaumarchais this morning. I beg you to see him upon the matter and try to impress upon him how indispensable it is that the work should be performed on the 5th June, as arranged."

This communication drew energetic protests from the reluctant author, but for once Louis held firm, and *Tarare* was performed on the 8th June "by order of the King."

Here was another count in Figaro's indictment of the abuses of despotism! Those who are on the look-out for grievances never have any difficulty in finding them.

"This work," wrote Grimm, in reference to *Tarare*, "is one of the strangest conceptions that I know of. . . . After telling the plain truth to ministers and nobles in his comedy *The Marriage of Figaro*, there still remained priests and kings to be dealt with in the same manner. Only the Sieur de Beaumarchais could dare it, and perhaps he alone would be permitted to do it."

Tarare met with considerable success, and was five times revived, after being subjected to various alterations, in order to bring it up to date. Its last appearance was made thirty-two years after its first. The number of people seeking admission on the first night was so great that the guard in the neighbourhood had to be tripled.

In September, after eighteen performances had been given, Beaumarchais wrote in high spirits to Salieri, in Vienna, that the opera continued to draw crowded audiences.

"On the 8th of this month," he says, "a great day at Saint Cloud: you made 4,200 francs, and last year, on a similar day, a first-rate work produced only 600 francs.

"Farewell, dear Salieri.

"Remember me to the giant named Gluck."

Three months later, Grimm chronicled the fact that "the representation of this opera draws crowded audiences, who listen in silence and a sort of bewilderment, such as was never seen before at any theatre."

Although the last of the Figaro trilogy of plays—*The Guilty Mother* did not make its appearance on the stage until 1792—it will be most convenient to deal with it in this place. Like *Tarare*, it was planned and partly written many years before its presentation. Beaumarchais, indeed, affirms that his two comedies were composed solely as an introduction to this third and tragic chapter in the fortunes of the Almaviva family.

Since the early days of the Revolution a small theatre had been opened in the quarter known as the Marais (close to the new home of Beaumarchais), in which he had acquired the controlling financial interest. He gratified the new company by promising them his new piece.

The first performance, accordingly, took place at the Théâtre du Marais on the 26th June, 1792. Its success at that time was not great. The moment was ill-chosen. Appearing as it did between the epoch-making days of June 20th and August 10th, how could it be otherwise? The most enthralling of dramas was then being played in the streets of Paris: there was no need to seek excitement elsewhere. Moreover, the company was not a first-rate one; but when, later, the piece was transferred to the Théâtre Français, it met with unqualified success, and has held the stage until quite recent times.

The Guilty Mother is a melodrama, but by no means the worst of its kind. The story, which moves swiftly and easily to its climax, is not devoid of genuine pathos, the dialogue is spirited, and the author shows himself to have lost little of his skill in dramatic presentation.

The piece is also interesting as an early example of a problem play.

The Guilty Mother takes up the story of the Almaviva family after an interval of twenty years. It portrays the Countess of Almaviva, a good and kind woman, broken-hearted at seeing the happiness of everybody she loves poisoned as a result of her moment of folly twenty years ago. Meanwhile, the villain of the piece, Major Bégearrs

(which, in the confidence born of his ignorance of English, M. de Loménie quaintly affirms to be an Irish name, though it is obviously an anagram, in deplorable taste, on the name of Bergasse), Major Bégearrs, we say, who has insinuated himself into the confidence of the family, with whom he has taken up his abode, uses his knowledge of her past guilt to terrorize her into consenting to her estranged husband's proposal of marrying him to his natural daughter, the charming Florestine, and disinheriting her own son by Chérubin, who has many years ago put an end to his remorse by seeking and finding death in a desperate military venture.

The only persons in the household whom the hypocritical Major has been unable to deceive are Figaro and his faithful Suzanne, who in the end succeed in unmasking the traitor.

As that eminent critic Geoffroy observed in reference to this conclusion of *La Folle Journée*, "the sequel to folly is always sad."

It must, however, in fairness be added that the play powerfully impressed many contemporaries, including Napoleon himself, and we find the aged Grétry soliciting the honour of setting it to music. "If you will let me do it," he said, "I will make the fury of Almaviva as much talked about as the fury of Achilles."

CHAPTER XXXI

BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE DELUGE

THE outbreak of the Revolution took Beaumarchais completely by surprise, and he viewed the violence and rapid extension of the conflagration with mingled amazement and apprehension. He was in the position of a man whose supplications have been suddenly and unexpectedly answered with an overwhelming and excessive zeal. The Immortals had shown no sense of proportion. He had petitioned for rain, but here was the deluge threatening at every moment to sweep him off his feet. The fact is, he was a revolutionist by instinct rather than conviction. How little he appreciated the extreme gravity of the situation for some years before the storm is proved by the fact that the 14th July, 1789, found him, then at the height of his financial prosperity, engaged in building himself a sumptuous mansion in the very centre of unrest, facing the Bastille, in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The site of the property is now covered by the Boulevard which bears his name, and by the Rue Amelot, where those thoroughfares open out into the Place de la Bastille.

Beaumarchais had entrusted the erection of his palace (for it was nothing less) to the well-known architect Lemoyne, and had accepted his estimate of the cost, amounting to 300,000 livres. But, as so often happens when men of ideas start building, the author of Figaro allowed his imagination to run away with him, and when the dwelling was completed he was faced with a bill for 1,663,000 francs. When, in 1818, after wearisome negotiations, the City Fathers took possession of the property under a municipal improvement scheme, they offered, and

the heirs of Beaumarchais were constrained to accept, the modest sum of 500,000 francs in compensation.

In a letter, dated 7th December, 1809, the widow of Beaumarchais entertains her friend Mme. Dujard with a vivid account of an interview with Napoleon on this subject, which her daughter, the beautiful Eugénie, contrived with an aplomb that would have warmed her father's heart.

"It was not mere curiosity," she writes, "which led my daughter to be present at the fête: her object was to speak to the Emperor, and, if he addressed her, to seize the opportunity to present a petition respecting our house, which for the last three years has been threatened, and during the past year marked out for demolition, whilst we are still kept in uncertainty as to its fate. My daughter succeeded: the Emperor spoke to her. Here is a part of the dialogue:

"'What is your name?'

"'I am the daughter of Beaumarchais.'

"'Are you married?'

"'To M. Delarue, a Commissioner of Excise, and brother-in-law of General Mathieu Dumas.'

"'Have you any children?'

"'Two boys and a girl.'

"'Did your father leave you his great fortune?'

"'No, Sire, the Revolution practically ruined us.'

"'Do you live in his beautiful house?'

"This was precisely the text of her petition, and she cleverly seized the opportunity by saying that this was the subject she desired to bring to His Majesty's notice; that she and her family were grievously injured by the plan which the Government appeared to have adopted; that throughout the three years during which the question of the demolition of our house had been under consideration we had lost large sums in rent, and that we had been compelled to suspend all repairs, greatly to the damage of the house and the utmost inconvenience of the family who are obliged to inhabit it.

"To which the Emperor replied:

"'Ah! well, your house shall be valued, and you shall be compensated for it; but it cost an immense amount

of money, and you must understand that we cannot pay for follies.'

"During the whole time my daughter spoke in a low voice, and the Emperor leaned over her with his head very close to the lady's ivory shoulder, and she ended by giving him her petition, which she had taken the precaution of bringing with her.

"What is so pleasing to us is that now we know exactly where we stand, and my children will, accordingly, know how to act. The worst of our adventure was that we had nothing definite to act upon : we did not know whether we were allowed to sell or whether others would be permitted to buy. Very shortly there is to be a law relating to private dwellings which happen to be in the way of works of recognized public utility or merely general embellishment. This act will regulate arbitration, the form and incidence of the payment of compensation, etc. We await it with impatience."

This law was promulgated on the 8th March, 1810, and thus the name of Beaumarchais was once again associated, even after his death, with the conquest of yet another essential right of citizenship.

It is clear that Beaumarchais had not lost his power of astonishing his compatriots. His house was for long regarded as one of the sights of Paris. It was an extremely luxurious building, like no other in the world, the house and grounds being designed and decorated, regardless of expense, by a man of great originality, if rather flamboyant taste, who was a past master in the art of living. The mansion was not quite completed when its proprietor viewed from its upper windows the fall of the Bastille.

The garden was laid out in the formal English style, and was full of fountains, rocks, grottoes, statues and temples dedicated to Glory, Friendship, Bacchus, etc., each of which bore an inscription composed by Beaumarchais. The sanctuary dedicated to Friendship bore the name of Dupaty, accompanied by the words : "We also mourn his loss." This fact shows that the much discussed quarrel between the two men was not of a very serious nature.

At a short distance from this tribute to his friend stood a bust of his first patron, Pâris Duverney, with an inscription recording his gratitude in these words :

> Il m'instruisit par ses travaux,
> Je lui doit le peu que je vaux ;

whilst a little further on, under a statue of Cupid, he expressed his anxious love for Eugénie in the lines :

> O ! toi qui mets le trouble en plus d'une famille,
> Je te demande, Amour, le bonheur de ma fille.

Lastly, over a secluded arbour he had written a kind of farewell to the world :

> Désabusé comme Candide
> Et plus tolérant que Martin,
> Cet asyle est ma Propontide :
> J'y cultive en paix mon jardin.

The property was not large, but was laid out with such ingenuity that it had the appearance of being much more extensive than was actually the case.

At the extremity of the garden, overlooking the road, was a domed pavilion in the shape of a rotunda, with a weathercock in the form of a great gilded pen set above a globe, which turned with the pen. This building, which was inscribed to Voltaire and bore the legend :

> Il ôte aux nations le bandeau de l'erreur——

was still standing in 1835 when all else had disappeared, and served the proprietor as a study. It was furnished in the most luxurious style, the writing-desk alone costing thirty thousand francs. By the side of this pavilion was an arched gateway (ornamented with Jean Goujon's sculptures known as the Seine and the Marne, removed from the recently demolished Porte Saint-Antoine) leading into the garden, and thence to a spacious Italian court, in the centre of which was a fine copy of *The Fighting Gladiator*. The entrance hall of the house was embellished with a copy of Houdon's Voltaire.

A magnificent spiral staircase of mahogany, with bronze balusters, led to the upper stories. All the apartments had inlaid floors of the most precious woods. The walls were decorated with the choicest works of Hubert

Robert and Horace Vernet, and the chimney-pieces were in Carrara marble, supported by caryatides, imported at great cost from Italy.

Such was the retreat in which the author of Figaro hoped to pass his declining years.

With his habitual generosity he threw open his garden, and readily accorded permission to see over the house to everybody who expressed a desire to do so. But he was not allowed for long to enjoy the pleasures of retirement. His mansion was destined to be a continual source of danger and anxiety to him and his family, and we soon find him protesting that "the only crime I have committed is that of owning a pretty garden." Within thirty years of its completion not a trace of the house or garden remained.

Being well aware of the widespread hatred which Bergasse had succeeded in arousing against him, Beaumarchais avoided as far as possible all interference in public affairs, but deeming it unwise to refuse, he accepted the post of President of the district of Blancs-Manteaux, to which he was unanimously elected. On the 14th of July he was happy to exert his authority to save the lives of several unfortunate soldiers from the fury of the people.

During the following days the Mayor of Paris ordered him to superintend the demolition of the Bastille, and he was soon after elected a member of the Municipal Corporation.

Denunciations now began to rain upon him. On more than one occasion his house and grounds were invaded and overrun by a yelling mob in search of grain and arms, of which he was again and again accused of concealing immense stores. These noisy patriots discovered that the vast cellars were filled with huge packages and, concluding that they had been well-informed, prepared to sack the building, when further investigations showed that the suspicious parcels contained nothing more incriminating than the surplus sheets of the owner's unlucky edition of Voltaire.

Beaumarchais did all he could to conciliate the people by making large contributions to charitable objects, by inviting official visits of inspection, and broadcasting these facts with all the ability of a born publicity agent.

In November, 1789, however, he emerged from his retreat to denounce with the utmost courage the tragedy of *Charles IX.*, by M. J. Chénier, on account of its savage incendiarism, at a time when it was as much as a man's life was worth to hiss that popular drama, and when even Mirabeau found it expedient to profess publicly his admiration for that nauseating spectacle of blood and sawdust.

A year later we find him addressing a complimentary letter to Barrère on his eloquent speech in favour of complete liberty of religious worship; and in June, 1791, we rather unexpectedly find the creator of Figaro petitioning the municipal authorities, on behalf of the practising Christians of his district, for the clergy to be permitted to celebrate Mass more frequently in the churches of his parish.

Meanwhile, his beloved Eugénie was finishing her education at the Convent of Bon-Secours, and it being reported to him that one of her schoolfellows was in distress through being unable to pay her fees, he immediately wrote to the Superior a letter which reveals his habitual kindness of heart.

"I beg to send you, madam, a note for two hundred livres for your unfortunate pupil. That will pay her fees for the present year. The next time I visit the Convent I will do myself the honour of handing to you on her behalf three louis, which will give her an allowance of six francs a month during this year, the same amount that I give my daughter. But I implore you, madam, not to allow my help to influence her in her liberty of choice. I should be grieved if she should be disturbed as to her future. I have not the honour of knowing her: I was moved solely by the good you told me of her. The only thanks I want is that she should be free from anxiety and less unhappy. I beg you to keep my secret, for I am surrounded by bitter enemies."

Attached to the MS. of this letter is a touching little note of thanks, addressed by the poor girl to her unknown benefactor.

Soon after this episode Eugénie left the Convent, and to her father's intense satisfaction came to live at home.

He described the day of her return as one of the happiest moments of his life. Some verses he wrote in celebration of this joyful event were the cause of a number of singularly impudent proposals, from complete strangers, for the hand of the young heiress, and the astonished father amused himself by giving these precipitate suitors a lesson in propriety.

On the decree abolishing all titles being passed, he wrote to his wife, on the 22nd June, 1790:

"What will become of us, my dear? We have lost all our titles. We are reduced to our surnames, without arms and without liveries! What a downfall! The day before yesterday I dined with Mme. de la Reynière, and we called her to her face Mme. Grimod: just that, without a tail! Monseigneur l'Évêque de Rodez and Monseigneur l'Évêque d'Agen got only a *monsieur* from us, everybody was called by his name: it was like coming out from the Opera Ball last season, when everybody was unmasked.

"This morning I wrote to Mme. la Comtesse de Choiseul-Gouffier. This is what I said to her: 'Until the 14th July, madam, out of respect for your rights, I will call you Comtesse; after that date, you must excuse me, if you please, but it will be only out of courtesy. . . .

"On the 14th Louis XIV. will be stripped, like every other great man. No more slaves at his feet in the Place des Victoires. Oh! it is most vexing! In order that the good Henri IV. might keep his four enchained statues we pretend that they represent four vices: it is denied, but we refuse to give way.

"On Sunday I made it clear that I no longer possessed any property bearing the name of Beaumarchais, and that the decree was aimed at territorial names, not against *noms de guerre*, and that it was under this name that I had always conquered my cowardly enemies."

Early in 1792 a Belgian came to him with the offer of the first refusal of sixty thousand muskets, on condition that the purchaser resold them to the Colonies—this stipulation being made by the Dutch Government, who were afraid of getting into difficulties with Austria if they were sold in Europe. "Money and intrigue: that is

your sphere!" says Suzanne of Figaro: she might have been speaking of his creator. Before embarking on this enterprise, however, he consulted Gudin, who gave him some sound advice:

"In revolutionary times," he said, "a prudent man will trade neither in arms nor foodstuffs." Unfortunately, like all shy people, he was easily discountenanced, and was soon led to doubt his judgment, when his arguments were met with undue vehemence from the other side. Both he and his friend had bitter cause to repent that he did not stand his ground. As so often happened, Beaumarchais convinced him that he was wrong, and the amiable Gudin was too good-natured to insist. That is why the friends of very self-confident people are seldom of much use to them.

Beaumarchais, knowing that the French armies were short of small arms, saw in the offer an excellent opportunity of combining profit and patriotism. He reported the matter to the Minister for War, who commissioned him to procure them, advancing for this purpose a sum of 500,000 francs (then worth 300,000 francs) on the security of bonds on the City of Paris for 745,000 francs. The Minister also promised, if necessary, a further advance to the full value of the agent's deposit, and to give all the help in his power towards overcoming the resistance of the Dutch Government, which held the arms, under guard, at Tervueren.

But the position of a minister during the Revolution was, to say the least, precarious. De Grève soon had other things to think about, and forgot Beaumarchais and his muskets. Moreover, on the outbreak of war with Austria and Prussia, minister succeeded minister with bewildering rapidity: "I have worn out fourteen or fifteen of them during the last few months!" declared the harassed Beaumarchais. He pestered them in vain to fulfil their promises.

Meanwhile, his enemies took the opportunity to accuse him of wilfully keeping back the arms. This charge was made from the tribune of the Legislative Assembly by the ex-Capucin Chabot.

On the 9th of August, accordingly, the mob invaded his house and grounds, and ransacked the place from top

to bottom, whilst the owner stood imperturbably looking on. Fortunately, he had already taken the precaution of sending Eugénie and her mother to Havre. In spite of the fact that the invaders found nothing to arouse the least suspicion, Beaumarchais was arrested and conveyed to the Abbaye prison. A day or two after his arrest, says Gudin, some of his commercial rivals were permitted to send a representative to him proposing to purchase the weapons from him. The hint was sufficiently broad; but he replied with great spirit: "Tell those who sent you that in prison I do no business." He was still at the Abbaye on the 30th of August—two days before the beginning of the September massacres. Before that day was over he was suddenly and unaccountably released. "That man's luck," said a wag, "is such that if he were being hanged the rope would break!" Beaumarchais was informed that he owed his freedom and his life to Manuel, the Attorney-General. As, in one of his numerous controversies, he had had occasion to make fun of his liberator, he thought that the latter had avenged himself by this act of magnanimity. Several years later he learned the inner history of this mysterious affair—probably from the heroine in one of their frequent quarrels—and, as we shall see later, he was furious with her.

What really happened was that when a young and exceedingly attractive society woman, whom he had befriended, heard of his imprisonment, she immediately made inquiries which pointed to Manuel as the person whose influence would be most powerful in saving her lover from the deadly peril in which he found himself. Desperate cases demand desperate remedies. Without hesitating a moment, she hastened to Manuel's office; solicited a private interview, which was readily accorded; made herself amiable, as she very well knew how to do; accepted the only kind of homage which the great man's limitations prompted him to offer; and triumphantly left his office with the order for her lover's release in her hands.

After this providential escape we might naturally suppose that the author of Figaro would have dropped the accursed gun-running expedition and devoted himself to securing his own safety. Not at all. Quite early in

life he had the misfortune to become exceedingly deaf, and, as he grew older, this infirmity did not tend to diminish his natural obstinacy. During daylight he consented to hide himself in the environs of Paris, but at dusk he regularly emerged from his retreat and made his way by side streets to the Government offices, in order to worry the ministers about the sixty thousand muskets which he had undertaken to secure for the nation and his enemies accused him of holding back. He soon understood that Lebrun, then Minister for War, intended to take all the credit of the transaction to himself if it succeeded, and to saddle him with the responsibility in case of failure. So he tackled Danton on the subject. His persistence ended by exasperating the great Tribune, until Danton's sense of the humours of the situation getting the better of him, he burst into uproarious laughter at the sight of this proscribed man, who, freshly escaped from the September massacres, should have been safely in hiding, daring, night after night, to beard the lions in their den, for the sake of people who were clamouring for his head.

In the end the importunate agent made himself such a nuisance that a committee was appointed, which passed a resolution that Beaumarchais had deserved well of the nation, granted him a passport to Holland, and ordered Lebrun and the French ambassador at The Hague to place every facility in his way whilst carrying out his mission.

Beaumarchais, thereupon, set out for Holland. A letter we have seen indicates that he journeyed by way of England.

" M. de Beaumarchais," says this document, " is safely arrived at Brighthelmstone, and has brought his head with him. He kept feeling the whole way if it was safe, and has not ceased wondering to find it on his shoulders."

Before embarking for Holland he borrowed a large sum of money (in case he could not induce the Government to keep its promises) from an English merchant, a good friend with whom he had done business for many years past. On his arrival at The Hague, he found the secret agents of Lebrun industriously working against the success of his mission, and his letters of protest to the minister

either remained unanswered or were evaded. He was at last told that the arms were no longer required.

In the meantime, the Legislative Assembly had been dissolved and the National Convention elected in its place. On turning over the pages of the *Gazette de la Haye*, on December 1st, 1792, he was amazed to find himself formally accused of conspiracy, secret correspondence with Louis XVI. and embezzlement, the report adding that for the third time the seals had been placed upon his house.

Among the Dropmore MSS. is a letter from Lord Auckland to Lord Grenville referring to this matter: "I have learned from Paris," he wrote on the 28th November, 1792, "that Beaumarchais, who is here, will become a victim in his fortunes to the Revolution, to which his talents so much contributed. It is said that on some charge his house and papers are seized. I cannot pity him."

A few days later, urgent letters reached Beaumarchais from his friends in Paris, informing him that police agents were on their way to effect his arrest and bring him back at all costs to face his trial, adding that he stood a good chance of being murdered *en route*. They implored him to fly to England without a moment's delay—sound advice, which he lost no time in following, as was noted at the time in a second letter, dated December 4th, 1792, from Lord Auckland to Lord Grenville, in these terms :

"Beaumarchais lately went from this place [Rotterdam] to England, where, though proscribed by his countrymen, he will do all possible mischief to us. There are others of the same description of exiles who are highly dangerous, and are now said to be in London, such as Messrs. de Bailly, de Chapellier, de Liancourt, de Narbonne, de Noailles ; and in addition to these, there are two hundred or three hundred emissaries from the Propagande, with allowances to live in taverns, coffee-houses and ale-houses, and to promote disorder. These considerations have induced me lately to say to many of the emigrants that, however ungenerous it may sound, I foresee that it will become necessary to turn them out of London, and, possibly, a great proportion of them out of England."

On a later visit, in fact, Beaumarchais was given three days in which to leave the country.

Shortly after his arrival in London he received a copy of Lecointre's speech, denouncing him to the Convention as "an out and out vicious man, who has reduced immorality into a principle and rascality into a system."

This was too much for Beaumarchais, and he resolved to return to Paris and defend himself in person. Fortunately for him, this foolhardy experiment did not commend itself to the cool judgment of the Englishman who had lent him his money, and before he could carry out his project he found himself lodged in the King's Bench Prison for debt. As he himself quaintly expressed it in a letter to his business manager, Gudin de la Ferlière, "My good Englishman thought it too much to lose his money and his friend at one blow."

The author of Figaro beguiled the tedium of his imprisonment by composing a voluminous pamphlet in his defence, and addressed a letter to the President of the Convention stating that he proposed to return to Paris with the least possible delay to defend himself in person against his accusers.

Although his English friend did everything possible for his comfort, the prisoner chafed at his confinement and knew no peace until Gudin, his manager, had succeeded in raising the money to liquidate his debt, and this being paid, he left the prison and hastened to Paris.

Immediately upon his arrival in the capital, he set about printing and circulating six thousand copies of his justification. In this pamphlet, he boldly declares:

"I would defy the Devil himself to make a success of any transaction in this awful time of disorder called liberty;" and after a generous tribute to the heroic Mlle. de Sombreuil, he dares to make fun of Marat himself, then at the height of his power.

"A little man," he says, "with black hair, hooked nose and frightful countenance, came forward and spoke in a whisper to the President; shall I tell you who he was? O! my readers! It was the *great*, the *just*—in one word, the *gentle* Marat."

He even took upon himself the defence of the King's ministers accused with him, and told the present rulers:

"In matters of national importance, the Royalist ministers alone have done their duty; all the obstruction has come from the popular ministers. . . . I was subjected to annoyance under the former Government, but even its worst vexation was mere playfulness compared with the horror of the present administration."

When we consider that these words were written and widely circulated in March, 1793, at the height of the Terror, it is clear that the author of Figaro was not lacking in courage. "The marvel is," as Sainte-Beuve remarked, "that he preserved his head upon his shoulders."

Beaumarchais succeeded in completely vindicating himself in the eyes of the Convention, and that required a great deal of doing. The decree against him was suspended, the sequestration of his property raised, and he was given the embarrassing choice of standing his trial or of making another effort to secure the muskets from Holland, now an enemy country, or of at least preventing them from falling into the hands of the English.

Fortunately, during his imprisonment in London, he had foreseen that this might happen, and had arranged for his friend, the English merchant, to purchase the arms, ostensibly on his own account, and hold them at Tervueren until he himself was in a position to dispose of them. But here the British Government stepped in to propound two propositions to this obliging friend: We have reason to view this deal with some doubt: either it is a genuine transaction, or it is not. In the first case we will take over the weapons and pay you a fair price for them; in the second case we shall confiscate them. But the Englishman made such an outcry against this threatened action that the matter was for a time dropped.

The Committee of Public Safety now gave Beaumarchais to understand that they were tired of waiting, and reminded him that his family and property were at hand to answer for his zeal and loyalty. With this encouragement, the emissary again set out on his travels. His mission necessitated his visiting Amsterdam, Bâle, London and Hamburg, to arrange for the weapons to pass through the hands of three fictitious purchasers successively, and

for their shipment to France viâ the United States. During these intricate negotiations, the only attention the Committee paid to their emissary was to allow his name to be placed on the fatal list of *émigrés*, to seize his property, and arrest his wife, daughter and sister. They were conveyed to the Port Libre Prison, and for eleven days remained under the shadow of the guillotine. Immediately after the fall of Robespierre they were released and allowed to occupy part of their house. Another denunciation being launched against the unlucky Beaumarchais, on account of the long delay in fulfilling his impossible mission, compelled him to escape to Hamburg, and served to reveal to the British authorities the secret of the Tervueren armoury. They promptly seized the weapons and transported them to Plymouth.

For some weeks after his arrival in the German city Beaumarchais lived in dire poverty, until a providential remittance from one of his American agents relieved him from actual want. But he was extremely unhappy, for he was cut off from all communication with his family. His only solace was that he found one or two old friends among his fellow exiles, including General Dumouriez, who soon after crossed to England, where he died at Henley in 1823. It was not until July, 1796, that Beaumarchais was allowed to return to France.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE EXILE'S RETURN, LAST YEARS AND DEATH

THE exile reached home on the 5th July, 1796, and his first care was to throw all his energy into an effort to save the remains of his shattered fortune, but although he succeeded in assuring a modest and gradually increasing income to his family, his last years were consumed in a grinding struggle against impecuniosity. Within ten years after his death, however, the faithful steward Gudin was able to report to his patron's daughter that her fortune then amounted to about one million francs.

Immediately after his return, Beaumarchais wrote to his first biographer that he had just married his daughter "to a young man who was determined to have her though everybody knew I was ruined; she, her mother and I all thought it our duty to reward this generous attachment. Five days after my return I made him this handsome present." Eugénie's husband was André Toussaint Delarue, who in 1789 had served as Lafayette's aide-de-camp in the American War of Independence, and was at the time of his wife's interview with Napoleon a Commissioner of Excise. Under the Restoration and the Government of July he was Colonel of the 8th Legion of the National Guard and Brigadier-General. They had two sons, one of whom became, like his father, a Brigadier-General, the other a Government official in the Ministry of Finance; and a daughter, Palmyre, who married M. Eugène Poncet.

Having thus safeguarded his daughter's future, Beaumarchais next presented his account to the Government for the large sums he had expended in his unsuccessful mission, and his claim for the return of the security he had deposited in their hands. But since the weapons had never reached them they were not anxious to make



From a lithograph by Delpech, after a drawing by Belliard.

[*To face p* 306.

restitution. After vexatious negotiations, lasting over two years, the Directory appointed a special commission to inquire into the subject, and the latter fixed the amount due to the claimant at 997,875 francs. But the Directory refused to adopt the finding of their Committee, and appointed a second commission, who not only reversed the decision, but asserted that the creditor was actually the debtor to the State to the amount of 500,000 francs. Beaumarchais spent the rest of his life in vainly seeking justice from his country and from the United States. At one time he was so impoverished that he had the greatest difficulty in finding the money to pay the tax on the two hundred windows of his house.

Amid these and other worries, and in spite of the fact that he had now become, as he says, "as deaf as a sepulchral urn," he maintained much of his gaiety and was as alert and interested as ever in the questions of the day. He constantly wrote to the papers, now to draw attention to the scandalous exposure of the remains of the great Turenne among the skeletons of animals in the Botanical Gardens, and now pleading for steps to be taken to secure the release of Lafayette and his fellow prisoners at Olmütz. Nor had he lost the secret of interesting the public. A journal having inexactly quoted the charming inscription which he had engraved on the collar of his pet spaniel, he wrote to Rœderer, the editor, thanking him for the complimentary tone of his article, but begging him to insert in his next issue the correct version :

> "I am Miss Follette ; Beaumarchais belongs to me.
> "We live on the Boulevard."

As soon as he had provided for the immediate wants of his family, Beaumarchais wrote to Gudin, who was living in poverty in the country, sending him money, and begging him to come to Paris and live with him for the rest of his days. Gudin gives a moving account of their meeting after these long years of danger and separation. They never parted again. Friendship is like a garden : what we get out of it largely depends upon what we put into it. This, Beaumarchais thoroughly understood : that is why he never lost a friend in his life ; and it is a remarkable fact that, without exception, the enemies who

embittered so many years of his existence knew him either very little or not at all.

His charity was boundless, and when he died Gudin de la Ferlière found that he had secretly spent no less than 900,000 francs in relieving the distress of various unfortunate artists, men of letters, and the families of impoverished gentlefolk. Even some of his most relentless enemies profited by this charity. On the 13th February, 1802, his widow wrote: "Madame Goëzman became destitute and he succoured her; Arnaud-Baculard figures on this list for 3,600 livres; Dorat, Fabre d'Églantine and others drew on his purse for sums which were never returned." Are there many people who could forgive and forget such cruel injuries as readily and completely as Beaumarchais?

"Stopping at an inn on one of his journeys," relates Gudin, "the host told Beaumarchais that there was a woman of rank upstairs who had been suddenly seized with illness and was lying there in an extremely critical condition, without money and without assistance. Beaumarchais immediately sent for a doctor, supplied all her wants, and stayed with her until she was convalescent. When she was well he found that she was young and pretty; he took her back to Paris. She loved him ever after." Gudin proceeds to defend his friend's knight-errantry against the possible attacks of the Simon Pures of his day. "Oh! nineteenth-century Pharisees!" he cries, "how uncharitable you are! I will not tell you a host of other adventures that I know of, which I would love to whisper into the ear of the good La Fontaine or of the good Queen of Navarre, who were as virtuous as you are, but had neither your barrenness of heart nor your aridity of mind.

"Beaumarchais, far from having your stiffness, forgave the erring sheep like the good shepherd, and never threw the first stone at anybody. He helped the unfortunate, even at the risk of falling in love with them and involving himself in adventures far more dangerous than your condemnation."

Such is Gudin's discreet but graphic narrative of the origin of his friend's relations with Mme. Amélie Houret,

Comtesse de la Marinaie, the lady who so gallantly came to her lover's rescue during the Terror. They first met in 1787. His first written communication to her is in these terms:

"I received the letter (dated the 29th of last month) with which you honoured me, Madam, upon my return from the country. Although I have more good-will than means of serving you and more courage than power, your kind and frank confidence must not remain entirely without response. If I cannot help you, I can at least listen to you, counsel and console you. You are right in preferring to tell me your troubles in my house rather than to have recourse to all the expedients necessary to arrange an interview at your Convent. But I have to return to Chantilly, and shall not be back until next Thursday; excuse me until that date, and then choose any morning that will best suit your convenience. I do not know what I can do for you, but the tone of your letter makes me extremely desirous of being able to do something. I will advise you immediately of my return; and, then, pray come whenever you like, and I shall await you with all the respect due to your misfortune, your sex and your spirit, from him who honours you with all his heart.

"P. Caron de Beaumarchais."

The next letter in this correspondence, which has so strangely come down to us, shows Beaumarchais in some alarm, seeking rather half-heartedly to cool the ardour of the lady's pursuit.

"I have read your memorandum," he writes, "which is as extraordinary as you are, most astonishing creature. I return it to you, although I was greatly tempted to take a copy of it. But you entrusted it to my probity, and I send it back to you intact as I received it, though I could not resist reading it to four or five friends, suppressing, of course, names, places and other details.

"You have far too much wit; that is what both I and my friends think. Your style, as original as your method of expressing yourself, and your strength of character delighted everybody. One or two of the gayer

ones, in fact, were eager to make the writer's acquaintance ; but I contented myself with enjoying their pleasure and admiration, without revealing your secret. And now, beautiful imperious one, what do you intend to do with me ? In the first place, I want never to see you again : you are an incendiary, and whether you will or no, set fire to everything. . . . I am happy and at peace with myself. I have renounced your sex for ever. Let us reason together, if we can. I know your business as well as you know it yourself ; but how can I help you ? What do you intend to do for your husband ? No doubt you will explain it to me : be frank and open with me. . . . But no more interviews . . . or this dainty little woman with her lofty ideas will end by making my heart her plaything. No ! no ! let us call a halt while there is yet time. Write to me what you think, feel, wish, demand of me ; I am your counsellor, your respectful admirer, but not yet your friend. Heaven preserve me from your charms !

"P. Caron de Beaumarchais."

But it is difficult to conduct a love affair on a basis of limited liability, especially with an inflammatory creature like the Comtesse de la Marinaie, and Beaumarchais soon found himself hopelessly involved in a devouring passion, from which he never succeeded in freeing himself.

The last of this series of unpublished letters that we have seen is from the lady, and is dated the 11th—and marked as finished at eight o'clock in the morning of the 12th—of Vendémaire (the 2nd and 3rd November, 1798). What is evidently a copy of her lover's reply is written between the lines. The letter and answer show that Beaumarchais has just been informed of the means employed five years before to procure his release, in the course of a furious, jealous quarrel with his tantalizing mistress.

The whole correspondence providés a melancholy commentary on the theme that a man's fate is his temperament, and that, in spite of the superficial modifications of character wrought by time, circumstances and education, the temperament alone remains steadfast and unchanging to the end.

When Beaumarchais put into Figaro's mouth those

terrible words: "I have seen everything, done everything, worn out everything . . . and now . . . disillusion! . . . utter disillusion!" he little thought that he was describing the fate reserved for himself.

In perusing these letters the feeling uppermost in the minds of most readers would be, we think, one of compassion.

On the night of the 17th of May, 1799, Beaumarchais, apparently in perfect health, kissed his wife good-night at the head of the staircase, after an evening passed in bright conversation, surrounded by his family and friends, and was the next morning found by his valet dead in bed. The cause of death was apoplexy, but its suddenness gave rise to some suspicion of suicide.

"Népomucène Lemercier," says Doctor Poumiès de la Siboutie in his *Recollections of a Parisian,* "was very fond of Beaumarchais and often spoke of his wit and social talent, but he always suspected that his wonderful spirits concealed some deep and abiding grief. As the latter grew older, he became more and more addicted to philosophic discussion. He was for ever cogitating about the immortality of the soul, and pressing Lemercier for his opinion of suicide. Lemercier absolutely denied the right of man to take his own life: sometimes Beaumarchais agreed with him, at other times he would argue and urge the cause of self-destruction. He probably shared Lemercier's views in his secret heart; but there are cogent reasons for thinking that he died of poison, self-administered." An appended note asserts that Lemercier made an emphatic statement to that effect at a dinner given by General Marescot on April 25th, 1825.

Nevertheless, we believe the suspicion to be entirely without foundation. Beaumarchais was, as we have seen, a man of proved courage, and never throughout his career admitted himself to be beaten. He was in the midst of the struggle to re-establish his fortune, and his adoration of his daughter, if nothing else, would preclude from his mind all idea of deserting her in the difficult circumstances in which she found herself. Enough has been said to account for his death in a natural way.

In youth the passions may be held in check by the mind; in age they have a more effective curb—the body.

Writing to Mme. Dujard a few days after her husband's death, Mme. de Beaumarchais says:

"Our loss is irreparable. The companion of twenty-five years of my life has gone, leaving me only useless regrets, a dreadful loneliness, and memories that can never fade. . . . He was always gracious in forgiving injuries and readily forgot ill-usage. He was a good father, a zealous and trusty friend, a born defender of the absent who were attacked in his presence. Superior to all those petty jealousies so rife among men of letters, he was always ready to counsel and encourage those who sought his advice and generously to assist them with his purse. From the philosophic point of view his end should be looked upon as a mercy; he slipped out of this laborious life, or rather his life slipped away from him, without struggle, without pain, without any of those heart-rending farewells to those who were dear to him. He quitted this life as unconsciously as he entered it."

Mme. de Beaumarchais died on the 1st April, 1816.

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Printed at The Chapel River Press, Kingston, Surrey.